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THE IMAGE IN THE SAND



E. F. BENSON

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THE IMAGE IN THE SAND

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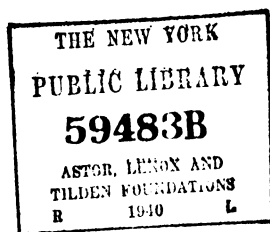


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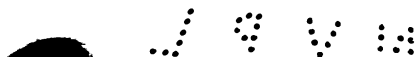
THE IMAGE IN THE SAND

FIRST

IT was drawing near the hour of sunset, which is also the hour of the arrival of the post-boat from Cairo, and each of these events furnished a sufficient reason why the greater part of the inhabitants of Luxor were strolling expectantly up and down on the high embankment which faces the Nile, on the eastern bank of that mysterious river. The sunset certainly, that evening miracle and intoxication of kaleidoscopic colour, was worth waiting for; the post-boat might or might not bring friends or desirable letters, but the other never played false, nor cheated the beholders of its series of inevitable glories. Already the Libyan hills across the river, peaks and ramparts and terraces of golden sandstone, were beginning to flush with a rose-colour incredibly soft and tender, and the shadows that lurked in their valleys and crevices were, every moment, in contrast to those ethereal pinks and madders, growing bluer and yet more blue. Straight overhead the sky was still a luminous turquoise, but towards the Western horizon it was turning green, a translucent watery green like the living internal light of aquamarines, and, reflecting it, the water under the western bank of the Nile was changing to a sheet of patinated bronze. The day had been very hot, and the sandy foreshore there, baked through and through, still set the air above it quivering, like a jarred string, but otherwise, up to the horizon of the hills, all the features of the landscape were cut out with the delicate precision of the Southern desert-encompassed land. Just above the topmost ramparts of the hills small fleeces of rosy cloud hung in wisps and carded streamers, and the

cultivated land beyond the river, the maize and the fields of young green corn, and bean crop in full expanded odour of flower, were growing momentarily darker in hue; blue of all shades down to deepest indigo mingled with the green, till the stretches of vegetation were like some huge mile-long peacock's tail. Far out, too, in that ocean of young growth, but dwindled at this distance to pigmy size, stood the huge statues of the vocal Memnon and his dumb fellow giant, hands on knees, and heads upraised with eyes that looked ever Eastwards to salute the rising of the day. In that dazzling gorgeousness of colour, everything, even the brown mud-houses of Luxor village, was transfigured, and for the moment all was golden and rose-coloured, jacinth and jasper.

The crowd, too, on the river-bank was hardly less polychromatic than the sunset, which so wonderfully made harmony of the tones which in less triumphant light would have jarred and jangled. Brown-faced, milky-toothed Arabs were there, dressed in gabardines of all shades of blue, with red shawls cast round their necks, and on their heads turbans of all colours, green to show that the wearer had made the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca, or red or blue or vivid orange. Then to the accompaniment of a jingle of bells and strange cries, a gray, mouse-coloured donkey would be steered like a ship between shoals along the crowded path, decked out in necklace of glass beads and stamped brass disks, with its red and high-peaked saddle bearing on it some mild-faced English spinster in an immense pith helmet and blue goggles, with the inevitable Baedeker in her hand, her guide trotting by her side, paddling along in the dust with brown square-toed feet. Here, squatting like hens by the wayside, two or three donkey-boys would be squabbling over the fair division of their backsheesh, with extravagant wealth of gesticulation and in shrill-voiced tones that would portend in the less mercurial races of the North some imminent and blood-thirsty quarrel. Not so with them: in another moment all the heat of the discussion was over, the division of the odd piastre was satisfactorily settled, and they were all laughing at once and nibbling amicably at the stick of sugar-cane which one had pilfered from a passing cart, and shared with the others before this financial question had caused the temporary estrangement. Women with faces half hidden by



their veils and sly sidelong glances were filling their porous water-jugs at the margin of the Nile, ebony-faced Nubians sauntered through the crowd, straw-hatted Englishmen lounged on the terrace over the hotel gate, dealers in doubtful antiquities swore by the lives of their fathers and grand-fathers that their green varnished scarabs and blue glaze figures were straight from the Tombs of the Kings, a couple of dayabeahs moored to the bank were a blaze of Syrian awnings, lateen-sailed native boats drifted like black long-winged birds across the mirrored sky of the river, the whole world of colour and light and chattering crowds was awake and alert, and moving and shifting and changing.

The glory of the evening hour grew more and more vivid in ever-increasing crescendo of colour, even as a fugue played by some master-organist rises from climax to climax as bank after bank of out-drawn stops and keyboard coupled to keyboard makes the air thick with tumultuous melody. Then the supreme moment arrived, as the sun touched and began to sink behind the Libyan hills. Then in a second all was changed: rose and gold, blue and green, were sucked from land and sky, as if sinking sponge-like into the earth, and gray, the echo only of colour, but gray of all shades and hues, from the luminousness of sunlit mist to the dark brooding gray of sea beneath thunder-cloud, took its place. A little cool wind awoke, and blew from the full-flowering avenue of mimosas in the hotel garden, filling the air with thick ineffable fragrance; the song of birds in the bushes, the chattering of sparrows, the flute of the hoopoe, ceased; and the sudden night of the South fell in layer after rapid layer over the sky.

Of this chattering crowd on the river-bank two had wandered somewhat apart, and were strolling some quarter of a mile from the pier upwards beyond the village towards the sugar-plantations, which were stirring and rattling in the soft breeze of the sunset. One was an elderly man, clean-shaven in face, with that look of spotless cleanliness and neatness which—so, anyhow, the English believe—is characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon. He was, perhaps, scarcely of middle height, and seemed not so tall as his companion, while about his face there was a certain mobility and look of sensitiveness which foreign nations, anyhow, do not reckon to be a salient feature in the type of John Bull. It would be hard

indeed to find an English epithet which could give in a word the keynote of this rather un-English look. It was neither weak nor womanly, but even less did it suggest Saxon inflexibility. It was the face of a man who, though middle age and he had long been companions, still retained the unsullied eyes of youth, and something of youth's divine unsatisfiedness. In any case, the ordinary observer would have looked twice at so attractive and sympathetic a face, unless, indeed, his eyes had happened first to fall on his companion. This other was a girl of not more than eighteen, tall and with the poise and carriage of a goddess. She had taken off her hat, which she carried in her hand, and the glory of her hair shone like a gilded halo round her head. It was pale gold in colour, of an extraordinary thickness, and, growing low on her forehead, more than half framed the short oval of her face. Her eyebrows, unlike her hair, were very dark, and almost level above her eyes, which were pure violet, the true violet of flowers which bear that name. So much the first moment of his glance would tell the passer-by, but if (and no alternative was possible) he looked longer, he would see that, beautiful as her face was, it was even more interesting than beautiful, so full was it of slight irregularities, entrancingly suggestive. Her nose was a little tip-tilted, full of eager curiosity; her mouth, thin and finely formed as to its upper lip, showed a lower lip that drooped far more than was in the least consistent with perfect beauty, but expressed an extraordinary degree of kindly tenderness. She carried her head very high, yet not so as to suggest disdain; for not otherwise does a flower, dew-refreshed by night, stretch its stem upwards into the air and the light. And air and light seemed to have gone to the making of this beautiful girl.

This radiant vision was very simply and very well dressed; a man, at any rate, might have said to his wife, "My dear, why don't you dress the girls like that?" while she, if educated in such matters, would have replied, "Yes, if you will pay for the most expensive Paris cut." She had on a thin white blouse, rather low in the neck, with a sort of white Eton jacket over it, a white leather belt, and a white canvas skirt. Into the belt she had tucked a couple of yellow feathery sprays of mimosa, plucked, as she came out, from the hanging tassels in the avenue of the hotel, but apart from that there was no colour of any kind in her attire,

except in her big flapping straw hat, which was trimmed with a huge scarlet bow. Nothing could have been simpler, but "Paris" was writ large over it all. She walked with great ease and grace, and kept almost step for step with her companion, talking in a very low and clear voice.

"Ah, let us wait a moment, father," she said. "Just look at the hills. Do you know that dreadful little critic—is he not?—Mr. Garner, told me to-day that sunsets were out of date, and I ought not to admire them. Was it a joke, do you think?"

"Mr. Garner jokes with difficulty," remarked her father cautiously.

"Then I am afraid I did the wrong thing, because I laughed. Never mind; he's not here now, so we can admire without exciting his undistinguished disapproval. And what is so extraordinary is that, though you and I have looked at a sunset a day for nearly two months now, we have never seen one that was at all like another. Or is it that one is really looking at the same sunset, but discovering fresh colours and effects? There, the sun has set."

Her father turned as she spoke, and at the moment the whistle of the approaching post-boat was heard, and in the still air the rhythmical beating of its paddles was audible. Soon after it appeared round a bend of the Nile, a black blot on the steel-coloured grayness of the river. Sir Henry Jervis watched it approaching for a moment or two in silence, as if considering a thought which its appearance had suggested to him.

"Mr. Henderson is probably coming up to-night, Ida," he said at length. "You did not meet him in Cairo, did you?"

The girl thought for a moment.

"Not that I can remember," she said.

"Ah, then, you certainly did not, or you would remember. Mr. Henderson has absolutely none of the quality of obliquity."

The girl smiled.

"Who is he?" she asked. "A friend of yours? I thought I knew all your friends."

Sir Henry let this pass.

"I think he will arrive by the post-boat," he said, "and though perhaps it seems inhospitable, as he is my guest, I think we will not meet him. I told Abdul to be there. The

reason is, dear girl, that I think I should like to tell you about him first."

They turned away again from Luxor and the approaching post-boat, and retraced their steps up the river.

"Is he a medium?" asked the girl, with a slight additional interest in her voice.

"No, a student only, an inquirer. But he has inquired far. He has systematized a great deal that has hitherto been vague, and he is now working and putting his theories to the test of practice. In particular he has studied certain ancient Egyptian doctrines concerning the immortality of the soul, and has found that they suggest possible means of communication with souls that have crossed the bridge or are waiting to cross, in a manner hitherto undreamed of. Materialization, for instance: he has some ideas about that."

His voice was raised a little in obedience to some vibrating excitement, and his pace quickened as he broke off, following up his thought to himself in silence. But as he spoke a slight look of trouble came into the girl's eyes, and her voice was nervous and frightened.

"But surely, father," she said, "you will not meddle with that? Surely Abdul would be very strongly against that, would he not? You know what he has always told us about the dangers of it?"

"Yes, but I am not prepared to trust implicitly to all Abdul's tenets. They contain limitations which I think cramp one's powers. And what he says, after all, is mere theory."

That look of trouble increased and darkened in Ida's face.

"But, anyhow, his theory is that it is Black Magic," she said. "Surely he would put that under Black Magic. I know he does. Of course, he has never denied that it is possible."

Her father did not reply for a moment.

"I do not feel sure that he is right," he said at length. "The nature of all spiritualistic phenomena must depend, so it appears to me, on the motives which lead one to seek and inquire. And I——"

He paused again.

"Ah, poor father!" said the girl, "I see what you want."

"Yes, dear; I want by any means to communicate more closely with your mother. That may be weak of me, it may

argue a lack of faith, but I have such an awful need of it. I want to see her, to touch her——”

The grays of the hour after sunset had deepened and deepened as they walked, and already the stars large and luminous had begun to hang their lamps in the deep velvet blue of the sky. In the East flamed Jupiter, higher up towards the zenith Venus blazed and burned, and midway up in the Western quarter of the heavens a tiny slip of crescent moon nursed in its lap, as it were, the dark shadow of the rest of the unilluminated orb, and seemed certainly paler than the more concentrated magnificence of the great planets. The upper horn of it pointed to the Pleiades, no longer enmeshed through this clear dry air in their golden net, but showing seven minute but distinct points of light; and low in the North, and swinging upside down—unrecognisable to the unaccustomed eye—hung the Great Bear, insignificant compared to the greater lights. Star after star, as if kindled by some celestial lamp-lighter, started into luminous being, and soon down to the very horizon, so that the stars sat on the edge of the desert like distant camp-fires, the innumerable company of the worlds flamed into sight, glorious beyond all conception to those who have never seen the splendour of the Southern heavens, for they burned with no vague diffused radiance, but, in this Southern night, with a hard, jewel-like blaze.

On their right, as the two still strolled southwards away from the village, lay the great ancient and mysterious Nile, the river which from generation to generation has supported and fed the oldest and the wisest of all civilizations, supplying all the wants of the myriads who for thousands of years have lived and loved and died on its banks, giving them the bread that nourished them, the water that they drank, the cottons that clothed them, out of its sole illimitable fertility. On its produce alone for thousands of years have the teeming millions of Egypt lived, and not of its water alone but of its mystery have they drunk, of the secrets of life and death and of the knowledge of the immortality of the soul of man. From the earliest records of six thousand years ago down to the present day has this strange secret folk lived in the atmosphere and the study of the occult and the mysterious, never proselytizing, never desirous to impart knowledge, but being content to know, pondering and learning of matters as

inscrutable as itself. They keep silence, too, about the great silence which stretches for ever round the tiny moment of activity which we call life, so that a man, if he is not an inquirer into such affairs, can spend a lifetime in Egypt, yet never guess that aught but piastres concerns the chattering children of the Nile.

Sir Henry Jervis and his daughter Ida had been now in Egypt nearly four months, of which they had spent the latter two up at Luxor. For the last sixteen years, since the death of Ida's mother, Sir Henry had passed the greater part of his time away from England, travelling in the first instance to seek distraction from the grief that had threatened to swamp and overwhelm his whole being, but for the last six years in zealous and continuous pursuit of occult knowledge. During these years his daughter had been his constant companion, and, like her father, her realest life was lived, not in the world of material things, but in that which to so many is synonymous with all that is fantastic and fraudulent, yet to the few is so infinitely more real than the mere external phenomena with which the conscious life is surrounded. India had been at first their winter-quarters, but for the last three years they had come every autumn to Egypt, making their original visit only in passage to India, but staying here and returning afterwards, since they found that deep in the heart of the land the knowledge of the mysterious and spiritual forces that reside in man was here more closely and deeply studied than in any other country of the world. To the majority of those who visit Egypt, Cairo is but a place of bazaar and dance, Upper Egypt but a shooting-ground of quail or a panorama of temples, according to individual taste, but the curious inquirer will find other things than these. Probably, too, he will not care to talk about them, for these are things too serious for general discussion, and those who draw near to the secret things of life and death find that they are life and death indeed.

Father and daughter continued their walk a little longer through the star-lit aromatic twilight, but nothing further was said between them on these subjects, and they discussed instead their plans for the next few days. Mr. Henderson, Sir Henry's expected guest, had not, apparently, visited Upper Egypt before, and they made a hospitable design of

expeditions to the various temples and remains in the neighbourhood. Karnak would occupy one day, the Temples over Nile another, the Tombs of the Kings a third. They might even, if Mr. Henderson was not tied for time, go up to Assouan for a couple of nights, and take a farewell look at Phylæ, before the stupendous vandalism of the dam destroyed the unique and exquisite charm of the place. This particular subject always roused Sir Henry's usually placid spirit to unreasoning rage, and the fact that so many millions more of acres would be rendered crop-bearing brought no counterweight to his mind. This explosion of wrath over, they turned, and, retracing their steps past the cotton-fields and plantations of sugar, got back to the hotel gate not long before dinner-time.

Then, after the hundred yards' walk through the fragrant tunnel of the avenue formed by the mimosas that met overhead, they came out on to the front of the white hotel. Abdul, Sir Henry's personal servant, was standing on the flagged terrace outside, looking out for their return, and sitting on the low wall of the balustrade, clearly seen in the light from the hall, was a young man, very dark of complexion, who got up with a quick, light movement when the two appeared.

Sir Henry briskened his pace a little when he saw him, and held out a welcoming hand.

"Ah, Mr. Henderson," he said, "I am delighted you have come. You arrived, no doubt, by the post-boat. Allow me to present you to my daughter, Ida. Ida, this is Mr. Henderson. Yes, Abdul, what is it?"

"You will dine out in the garden, Sir Henry?" asked the man. He spoke English with that foreign precision that seems to give to each word its separate individual value.

"Certainly—if you are not afraid of the night air, Mr. Henderson. On warm nights my daughter and I usually dine in the garden. I think you will find that there is no night-chill in the air."

"That would be very pleasant," said the young man. "An hour indoors is always a waste of time, if one could have spent it out."

The garden at the Luxor hotel is a delectable place of palms. Sixty to eighty feet high they stand, slender, slim,

and dusky-stemmed, and high up at the top of the trees stretch the glorious fern-like fronds of foliage beneath which hang the clusters of yellowing dates. Here rises a thicket of bamboos, tremulous and quivering even on the stillest and most windless nights, and a great cat-headed statue, wrought in black granite; and taken away from the neighbouring Temple of Mut in Karnak, looks with steadfast gaze out and beyond over the Eastern horizon, with eyes focussed beyond material range, as if waiting for the dawn of the everlasting day. Over trellis-work foam pink cascades of bougainvillia, gorgeous scarlet creepers and hibiscus shoot wayward flames through the dark-green foliage, and the scent of hundreds of roses is thick in the air.

It was close beside the great cat-headed god, sheltered by the thicket of bamboo and withdrawn a little from the publicity of the path, that Abdul had caused their table to be laid, and the white tablecloth, glistening with silver and lit by shaded candles, made a vivid and a modern note in the antique darkness. And in spite of the fact that father and daughter had lived so little in the world and devoted themselves so much to occult and archaic lore, this note of modernity was echoed also in the perfectly light and easy conversation that flowed very naturally from all three during the earlier stages of dinner. But behind in the shade and close to them stood the great cat-headed statue, and Abdul in his green turban and black gabardine, of the mysterious and ancient race, waited silently on their wants. In the shade, too, of the minds of all of them flowed a river of thought more essential, more vital than their present talk, which, so to speak, but buzzed like flies over its surface. And before long these flies and surface things were dispersed: the rush of the river became gradually audible.

"Well, Ida, I must say, is usually a good prophet," her father was saying, "and if she says there is going to be Sirocco it makes one pause before making arrangements to see the Tombs to-morrow. But the sky is quite clear yet, and there is no wind."

"Yes; why do you think we shall have a sirocco, Miss Jervis?" asked Henderson. "It comes from south-west here, I suppose?"

"It comes from my bones," said Ida. "Sirocco starts in the middle of my spine, like the vibration of a kettle on the

boil. From there it runs up to my brain, where it effervesces and tingles—I wonder you can't hear it: it is behaving like this glass of Apollinaris—from there, no doubt, it takes a leap to the south-west and comes back again externally. There, the palm-trees are beginning to whisper."

As she spoke a gentle murmur, as if some overhead presence said "Hush!" made itself heard above them. Then, in obedience apparently, all was still again.

"And your brain tingles to-night?" asked Henderson.

"Yes. I am excited, and also I am rather frightened. You may call it the jumps if you like, but it is Sirocco. The sight of a big crowd gives me that feeling, too. Ah, what a dreadful thing a big silent crowd is! one is in the presence of so much force."

"Ah, force is always present," said her father. "We can't get away from that. Personally, the presence of force strikes me most when I am alone."

"But in presence of a crowd it is made visible. And Sirocco gives me the impression of a huge crowd still unseen, but coming nearer."

Again their talk deepened: the river took a sudden downward leap.

"A curious thing happened in the bazaar at Cairo the other day," said Henderson. "Quite unexplainedly in the middle of the afternoon there was a panic and a general stampede. Fear suddenly leaped into the middle of the crowd, like an escaped wild animal. I was there at the time; indeed, the panic started close to me."

He paused a moment, and then went on: "I was bargaining over a curious little amulet I found in a stall, when suddenly I saw frightened, terror-stricken faces round me. In ten minutes the panic had spread from end to end of the bazaar. My shopman fled with the rest, and I was left quite alone. I might have looted the whole place if I had felt disposed."

There was a crash of broken crockery at this moment: Abdul, whose deft, quick fingers were unknown to do such a thing, had dropped a plate, and Sir Henry, looking up at the noise, saw him standing there empty-handed and unmoving, staring at the speaker. But in a moment he recovered himself, picked up the fragments, and went on with his serving.

"That is very curious," said Sir Henry. "And it was quite unexplained?"

"Absolutely. It was, I suppose, one of those sudden mysterious forces that move crowds," said Henderson. "Some deep-sea current, as it were, some uncharted tide. I remember a few years ago a similar thing happened in England, but on that occasion to animals. In the middle of the night all over Hampshire and Wiltshire there was a regular panic among sheep and cows. They broke through fences, galloped down roads, and were found miles from home in the morning."

"And what happened then—in the bazaar, I mean?" asked Ida.

Henderson laughed.

"A dreadful anticlimax," he said. "I waited there, as I tell you, quite alone for some ten minutes. Then the folk began to come back, looking rather shamefaced and puzzled, but still, I fancied, a little nervous. I continued my bargaining and bought my amulet. A quarter of an hour later chattering and chaffering were going on as briskly as ever."

"And what was your amulet?" asked Ida suddenly. "Ah, there are the palms whispering again!"

"A rather curious one. I have never come across one like it. It is concerning somebody's Ka—his ghost, you know, or his astral body, if you prefer it. I have it somewhere upstairs: I should like to show it you."

Once again Sir Henry, looking up, saw that Abdul was observing his guest very attentively, and once again, evidently with an effort, he recalled himself to his duties.

Sir Henry turned in his chair towards Henderson with an air of great interest.

"That is extremely curious," he said. "Have you deciphered it?"

"Sufficiently. The astral body or ghost of Set-nekht was apparently a very uneasy spirit, and used to haunt very vividly the scenes of his earthly life. The amulet which I bought was evidently intended to lay it, and let it rest."

Sir Henry leaned forward in some excitement.

"Set-nekht?" he said. "He was the architect of several temples here. And they have lately found the statue of his Ka. I mean quite lately: only a few days ago."

For the third time Abdul was watching very intently, but

at the moment the glass doors of the hotel drawing-room giving on to the garden were opened, and the folk of the hotel, emerging from the *table-d'hôte*, began to stream out into the dusky warmth of the evening. Many passed near where our party was dining, and their privacy was interrupted for the present. Soon after the rather shrill tinkle of the bell of the English chapel which stood at the back of the garden, some fifty yards away, began to sound, and presently the chaplain with several large hymn-books in his hand came out of the hotel. He was a rabbit-faced little man, intensely Protestant, and devoted to lawn-tennis, dancing and the care of his migratory flock. He made a point always of talking to everybody in the hotel in virtue of his pastoral relation, and as he passed close to the table, where dinner was all but over, he came forward with a Christian and mildly jovial air. Religion, as he often said in his sermons, ought not to make one melancholy, nor inapt to enjoy the blessings and pleasures of this temporal world, so long as they are innocent.

"How wise of you, Sir Henry, to dine out of doors this hot evening!" he said. "Miss Jervis, I picked up a beautiful scarab this afternoon, very fine blue, which I must ask you and your father to decipher for me. So cheap, too: only ten piastres."

Sir Henry turned to him with a rather abstracted air, but most polite.

"With pleasure, Mr. Raymond," he said. "Will you not join us here, and take some coffee?"

Mr. Raymond beamed with innocent pleasure.

"I am afraid I have not a moment now," he said, "as we have a choir practice for next Sunday. That is why the bell is ringing. We are going to attempt an anthem by Barnby." And he hurried off to this musical feast, humming to himself like a honey-gathering bee.

But this interruption broke for the time the current of their conversation, which was not, however, far diverted, but ran down a parallel channel.

"Nothing can equal the childlikeness of superstition," said Ida. "There was an eclipse of the moon last month, and terror was rampant. It was supposed that Allah was shutting up the windows of heaven or that an evil spirit was eating the moon, and all the time the eclipse lasted the whole popu-

lation was beating drums and blowing on horns to frighten the evil spirit away. It is all exactly what an ordinary child would conjecture to be the matter, and the ordinary child would take just such a step to stop this infernal meal."

"And it was successful?" asked Henderson gravely.

"Well, for the time, but next time that the moon was new it was seriously feared it had been not only swallowed, but digested. Ah, there is the wind beginning again. I know Sirocco is coming."

This time the "Hush" was louder, and they could hear the clashing together of the dry palm-leaves; then came a sudden hot gust of wind through all the garden, and overhead the long, dry palm-fronds were tossed about as if the tree was waving its arms in some sort of dreamland despair and terror. At the sound a strangely vivid and nervous look came into Ida's eyes; violet as they were by day, by night they were black, and now they shone with a strange dark tremulousness as of water shimmering in some deep well. She got up quickly from the table, dinner being just over.

"I can't sit still," she said. "I must walk about or go indoors. I am sure you will excuse me, Mr. Henderson, but the effect of this dreadful wind on my nerves is absolutely irresistible."

She left the table and went down the path towards the hotel, a flutter of white drapery. Halfway up it she met Abdul bringing the coffee.

"You will have coffee, miss?" he asked.

"No, it would only excite me more. Oh, Abdul, why is the wind so wicked? There is something dreadful in the wind to-night."

He smiled at her, showing his milk-white teeth.

"I cannot make you think differently," he said, "yet the wind hurts no one."

His face grew grave again.

"But there are things in the air to-night that I, too, do not like," he said. "The protection of all good be near us."

The other two were sitting in silence when he came to them, and in silence they took their coffee. The wind was rising and falling again, still no more than a breeze, but very hot and dry, as if coming from some open furnace-door far away. Hymns apparently were to be practised too, for from

the wide-flung door of the chapel came the rather nasal whine of the harmonium, and then the voices took up the tune of "A few more years shall roll."

At that Sir Henry spoke.

"How extraordinarily dramatic that is!" he said. "Here are you and I, two modern Englishmen, seated under the trees in this immemorial land, with who knows what spirits of the thousand-year-old dead around us, close to us. And from that chapel we are reminded that all time is so infinitesimally short, so minute a point in the unending scroll of eternity."

He paused a moment, while Abdul retreated noiselessly again towards the hotel.

"I am glad for certain reasons that Ida has gone," he said, "because I want to talk to you about things I would prefer not to speak of before her—not at present, at any rate. You told me last time I met you that you had been investigating the phenomena of certain spirits apparently clinging to certain spots."

Henderson thought over this a moment, as if recalling something.

"Yes, I believe I was studying that last autumn," he said. "Yes, of course, of course: it was *à propos* of haunted houses generally, and in particular of the haunted tomb at Beni-Hassan, where, as I think I told you, human sacrifices had been made. But I have been employed for the last month or two on a different line of investigation, and to me a far more interesting one. The two are closely connected, though: one cannot exactly call them different."

Sir Henry finished his coffee, and passed the cigarettes over to the other.

"It would interest me very much to hear about your work," he said.

Again a great gust of hot wind buffeted its way through the troubled garden. A scarlet blossom of hibiscus fell on to the white table-cloth, and lay there in the candle-light like a fallen flame. From the church near by the practising choir sang "A few more suns shall set."

Henderson waited till the gust had passed, and, nursing his match, lit a cigarette. Everything he did, every physical motion, was astonishingly neat: the flame of his match burned as steady in the shrine of his enclosing hands as in a room.

"Well, it seems to me nearly certain that there are two sorts of haunting spirits," he said, "either of which it is possible to materialize. Some haunt places, notably when such places are the scenes of some crime which they have committed in life. Many haunted houses come under this group of appearances, so, of course, also does the tomb at Beni-Hassan, which seems certainly to be an authentic story, and a rather gruesome one. In fact, it is impossible to doubt the existence of this phenomenon. The other class of haunting spirit is that which remains—for how many years, who shall say?—close to someone on the earth whom in life it loved, by whom it was beloved. To materialize such is, for what reason I do not know, more difficult. But it is possible. Some such idea, some such design, perhaps has crossed your mind?" he added softly, looking up at Sir Henry.

Sir Henry leaned forward across the table.

"For sixteen years that idea has continually crossed and recrossed my mind," he said, "and for the last six months it has been with me like an obsession. It crosses and recrosses no longer: it burns there like a flame."

"Your wife, you mean," said the other.

"Yes."

There was a silence, and the figure of Abdul appeared to clear away the table. But seeing his master and his guest still sitting there he withdrew again. Another hymn was being sung by the choir; the words were distinctly audible, "And then for those our nearest and our best."

Then Jim Henderson spoke again.

"Have you found any tangible, definite difficulty which has prevented your success in this materialization?" he asked, and his face suddenly looked rather thin and sharp in the wavering light.

Sir Henry shook his head.

"I will tell you why I have never even made the attempt," he said. "It is because I have several times in séances been warned not to. I have been told that should I succeed in the materialization it would make the spirit of my wife earth-bound, or, at any rate, there would be the danger of its doing so. Another danger also has been hinted at, which I do not quite understand."

"Ah, I know—I can guess anyhow," said Henderson, tap-

ping the table with a sudden show of impatience. Quiet and courteous as his manner usually was, there was something not quite well-bred in this: his tone, too, hectored a little. "You have been warned that what you succeed in materializing may not be the spirit of your wife, but an impersonation of her by some evil control. You will excuse me, but how can such an old-wives' tale concern us?"

Sir Henry did not answer: by his silence, however, he admitted the truth of Henderson's conjecture.

"The former reason, too," continued he, "that also seems to me very insufficient. For, giving that your wife is now a haunting spirit, and is continually near you——"

"And how certain I feel of that!" said Sir Henry.

"If that is so, I say, she is already to that extent earth-bound. Either of her own will or in obedience to conditions which we do not understand, she is constantly by you, nor can any materialization—such, at least, is my view—produce any bad effect on her. If, however, she is not a haunting spirit, it is quite certain that you will not be able to materialize her, and again no harm is done."

Sir Henry was staring straight in front of him, clenching and unclenching his hands nervously.

"Ah, if I could only see her!" he said. "So many doubts and questionings would be set for ever at rest in my mind. They come to me flapping round my head, like dreadful bats, till at times they bewilder me utterly. And you know I have so often tried, in company with my daughter and Abdul, to get the materialization by other means—means which are certainly safe."

"What means?" asked Henderson.

"Prayer and one's own will. And so often I feel sure we have been on the very edge and turning-point of success. Her presence has been more real to me than the presence of the sky or the earth, or those human beings who are present with me. But never have I quite seen her—never quite."

"Abdul is your servant?" asked Henderson after a pause.

"Yes, and my master. Another time I will tell you about him. It is a curious story."

Again a sudden hot blast coursed its way through the garden as a wave swirls among the seaweeds of the shore. Then for a moment came a lull, and Abdul again appeared

round the thicket of bamboo, waiting to move in the apparatus of dinner. Sir Henry rose.

"Yes, clear away, Abdul," he said. "Shall we stroll by the river for a little? The heat is getting very oppressive: we may find it a little cooler there. My daughter was quite right. Sirocco is certainly coming up. It is strange what dread she has of Sirocco: a nervous affection, I suppose. She always says that, some day Sirocco will bring dreadful things to us."

It was evident that this discussion had very profoundly moved Sir Henry, and that he did not wish for the present to speak of it further, for he returned immediately to the subject of the amulet. But this was but a boomerang flight: their talk, obeying obscure but irresistible laws, must soon return to its starting-point.

"A charm for laying the spirit of Set-nekht, I think you said," he remarked. "It is a curious coincidence too, is it not? that Set-nekht's Ka statue has lately been discovered here. A very fine sandstone portrait statue, in excellent preservation."

Henderson laughed.

X "Ah, I have quite abandoned the word and the idea 'coincidence,'" he said. "There is no such thing. All things that happen are links in a chain. There would be no links missing if one were more clear-sighted, and there would seem to us to be nothing that was not a link. But this particular link appears to me most important, a very big strong link. The temple is near here, I think you said. I must go there."

He laughed again rather excitedly.

"Perhaps Sirocco has got into my head too," he said, "as it has into Miss Jervis's: anyhow, my brain is tingling—what was her expression?—yes, effervescing like mineral water. Cannot you guess what I am going to do?"

Sir Henry thought a moment, pausing on his step.

"No, I have no idea," he said.

"I am going to have a séance there," said Henderson, "and if there appear indications that spirits are present, I shall smash the amulet to atoms. For supposing, supposing that the inscription on this amulet is true, genuine—and the ancient Egyptians were very practical people—supposing that it has been efficacious all these years in laying the spirit

of Set-nekht, if I break it, may not the spirit of Set-nekht become unquiet again? I must show you the amulet to-morrow." He broke off suddenly, and then continued more rapidly: "Perhaps even we could materialize it. . . . Ah, what a possibility, a miracle to stagger the unbelief of a Thomas! And now, Sir Henry, will you come with me and see? Probably nothing will happen. But again——"

They had turned to the right on coming out of the mimosa avenue that led to the river-path, and paused opposite the temple of Luxor. In the dim, sand-burdened air, the columns rose gigantically magnified, and between two they could see the colossal Rameses sitting patiently waiting for what the great wheel of circling centuries should bring. Further down the obelisk lifted its slim finger into the sky, and beyond slept the huddled roofs of the villagers. The air was already thick with the sand blown from the desert, and in the last half-hour the wind had risen almost to a gale. Firm and strong it blew, hot with its passage over countless miles of desert, coming from the mysterious heart of Africa. Already above them the stars that had burned with so bright and excellent a flame in the hour after sunset were veiled, and for the clear blue velvet of the sky they had a thick air gray with dust. And whether the excitement of Sirocco had infected Sir Henry also, or whether the contagion of his companion's excitement had spread to him, certainly a sort of recklessness seized him.

"Yes, I will come with you," he said, "and after that we will go a step further together. But we will not talk about that to-night. You must show me the amulet, if you will, to-morrow, and we must talk over what our first experiment shall be. Has Sirocco got into my head, too, do you think? I feel strangely disquieted and excited. Or is there indeed some dreadful potency awake to-night? Let us go back to the hotel. The wind is unbearable out here."

They turned and retraced their steps again through the tunnel of mimosa. Though it was still not very late, but few people were about, and the white-robed servants flitted about ghostlike putting up shutters everywhere to keep out the infiltration of the dust. In the garden the palms were moaning and waving wild arms, the choir practice was over, and the church shut: only the great cat-headed statue sat silent and immobile, looking out with patient eyes over the Eastern horizons.



SECOND

SIR HENRY was seated next morning in his sitting-room in the hotel. Sirocco still raged outside, and though the air was stiflingly hot, it was impossible to have the least chink of window open, else in an hour the room would have been smothered in sand. The wind outside blew with a steady roar and violence like the outpouring of some great cataract in flood, without abatement or cessation, and though it was near noon-day a thick palpable twilight reigned outside. And in front of him was standing Abdul, his eyes shining, and speaking with vehement gesticulation, not as a servant to his master, but as a superior to his subordinate.

"I tell you no," he said. "It is black; all such work is the Black Magic. And I know well who has brought it here."

He paused a moment, and his eyes softened.

"I beseech you, effendi," he said.

Sir Henry rose.

"I must, Abdul," he said. "I can resist my desire no longer, and my real and honest belief is that I am not bidden to resist it. I know you think otherwise." He paused a moment. "Abdul, I don't undervalue your faithfulness and your devotion. I know, too, how utterly astray I seem to you to be going from the way, but I must make the attempt, try to raise the spirit of Set-nekht, and if that is successful try through him to bring her back to me. You call it Black Magic. But what you call Black Magic is regarded as perfectly right and proper by many of our students in England."

"It is the Black Magic," said Abdul. "And you run more dangers than I can tell you of. But one danger is this: the spirit you try now to raise may be of awful power and of

evil power. What if you do raise it, and what if it come to you in the form of her whom you seek? If to raise it is possible, the other is possible also."

Again he paused.

"It may be different in England," he said; "what is black here may be white there, even as your folk are white and we black, but here in Egypt such work is black. The panic at the bazaar that was spoken of last night, the amulet of the Ka of Set-nekht, all that, too, is the Black Magic, effendi; it is the stirring of the Pool of Evil, and a man had better stir the water of the Black Lake of Medinet, and inhale its vapours, than stir the Evil Pool. And the stirring you speak of goes deeper than the panic and the amulet. The very slime and horror of the pit are moved."

"I have told you of no stirring," said Sir Henry.

"No, perhaps you have not, but I know—my very bones know it. You would raise her, just to speak with her and touch her. Have you so little faith? You do not know what you do."

A sudden blast of the fury of the wind buffeted round the house so that the room shook.

"Effendi, I am forty years old," said Abdul, "for forty years have I lived here, and never in my memory has Sirocco raged like this. The wind is evil: there is death and danger in the wind."

Sir Henry felt, somehow, unaccountably relieved at this: Abdul, at any rate, was in this wholly unreasonable, for he, like Ida, was converting the ordinary effects of barometric pressure into psychical terms. Also the remark was utterly contrary to Abdul's whole philosophy, for he held that in Nature there was neither danger nor evil.

"Why, Abdul," he said, "how often have you told me, and Miss Ida too, that all Nature was beneficent, working for good?"

"To those that seek for good," said he. "Yet there is evil abroad to-day. And I speak for the last time."

"And then?"

"If you persist I leave Luxor this evening," he said. "I will not be here while Black Magic is abroad. I will not be of the household of one who meddles there."

Sir Henry got up with some impatience.

"You shall do nothing of the sort," he said. "I give you

the order not to go. In all things you have yourself told me it is your path to serve me."

"In all but in this," said Abdul, "for I will not serve evil."

For the first time in these three years he turned to leave the room making no obeisance to his master. But before he reached the door a tap came and Jim Henderson entered. Abdul drew back for him as if to avoid contact, and when he had entered, left the room.

Ordinary morning greetings passed between the two, and Henderson took a seat.

"Miss Jervis was right," he said. "It is Sirocco with a capital S, the very king and apotheosis of wind. Do you know, I am not naturally nervous, but I really believe that man of yours will murder me if he gets a chance. I should so like to know why; really, I think I would let him cut my throat, if he would first give me a quiet, reasonable explanation of why he was doing so."

Sir Henry did not smile.

"He will get no such chance, I am glad to say," he remarked, "because he has this moment left my service."

Henderson looked interested: perhaps the explanation would come without the throat-cutting.

"Indeed?" he said. Then after a pause: "You were going to tell me about him this morning," he added.

"I will do so," said the other. "You will not, I hope, mind a somewhat lengthy narrative. The cigarettes are by you."

He pushed back his chair from the table where he had been working, and leaned easily back in it, as if for a long talk.

"It is three years ago," he said, "that I first saw Abdul, during the first winter I spent in Egypt. I had been introduced in Cairo to Achmet Pasha, whom you may know, at whose house in the Sharia-el-Makabh I attended my first native séance. Two other Pashas were there, a couple of Englishmen, myself, and a man whom I had several times seen outside Shepheard's, an ordinary dragoman, who, as a matter of fact, had once taken me through the bazaars, who had been recommended to me because he was thoroughly trustworthy, and spoke English really perfectly. That was Abdul. Now, the first thing one learns in Egypt, so I found, is to be surprised at nothing. So I shook hands with him,

for I was introduced quite formally by Achmet Pasha, and Abdul in the most natural way said he knew of a dealer who had several turquoises which we might care to buy—we had gone turquoise-hunting—and if I pleased he would take me to him next day. But I suppose I had not learned my lesson of not being surprised quite thoroughly yet, for Achmet said—you know his courteous manners—‘Ah, Abdul has been your dragoman, and you are surprised to meet him here, Sir Henry. But here we are all equal, except Abdul, who is our superior.’

“I need not trouble you at any length with the details of that séance, which, however, was the first of the sort that I had the privilege to attend. Abdul was the medium, and I was asked to impose what tests I pleased. I imposed tests which were quite unnecessary, but somewhat stringent. I tied his ankles together and he smiled. I tied his wrists together and he smiled. I tied him round the shoulders and he still smiled. I locked the door and pocketed the key, I bolted the windows, I examined the table, which was very large and heavy, and I searched the room with really painstaking thoroughness. Then, in all innocence, I said that with the leave of all there present I would close the shutters, draw the blind and make darkness. At that Abdul smiled again. ‘Does the effendi desire darkness?’ he asked.”

“Ah, that is interesting,” said Henderson. “One manifestation in the light is worth fifty in the dark. I detest conjurers. I beg your pardon——”

“That, I allow, surprised me again, and I explained that I supposed darkness was necessary. But Abdul said, ‘Darkness or noonday, it is all one!’ Then we sat round the table, and in clear light the séance began. Then Abdul, tied and examined, smiled no more. He said a prayer in which both Mussulman and Christian could join, for it was addressed to the Omnipotent Spirit of Good. It was in Arabic, a language which I understood but imperfectly then, but I have heard it often since. And rendered into English what it amounts to is, ‘Lighten our darkness, O Lord, we beseech Thee’—our third evening collect. Then Abdul fixed his eyes on the crystal which had been placed on the table in front of him, and began breathing very deeply.”

Sir Henry paused a moment: outside the wind was maniac; inside Henderson’s chair creaked as he leaned forward.

"I suppose not more than five minutes elapsed," said Sir Henry, "before Abdul went off into what we should call deep trance. I tested that too, the knife on the back of the hand—you know the test; conjurors would not like it. His hand was absolutely unsensitive. Then immediately the phenomena began. The table rocked violently, and there were deep tremors that passed through it, like—like the tremors of a fishing-rod when you have hooked a heavy salmon. Then there came a sound of rain falling heavily, a phenomenon curious in Egypt, and a strong wind passed round the room. Then one tap, very loud. And Achmet Pasha said: 'Will you question the spirit, Sir Henry?'"

"I asked a very simple question, and one that is usually critical. 'What am I thinking of?' And my wife's voice said, 'Of me.'"

"Now, nobody but myself knew my wife's voice, which, I may assure you, was very individual. I have never heard a voice which I could have mistaken for it. Also, to the best of my knowledge, I had never spoken of her to any of those present. I am, too, quite certain that Abdul's lips did not move. And I went on questioning. Answers came. 'I have been dead sixteen years.' 'I have always been near you.' 'She has violet eyes.' That was in answer to a question about my daughter. Then I asked when I should see my wife again. And the answer was that I should see her this month, this March in which we are now living. And in this very month you come to me holding out this possibility."

Jim Henderson took another cigarette, but he held it unlit, and Sir Henry continued.

"I will pass over other details," he said, "but next morning Abdul was waiting for me outside the hotel. He made no allusion at all to the events of the afternoon before, and we went, with Ida, to the merchant of turquoises, where he bargained for me like an ordinary gesticulating dragoman. We dined at home that night, and sat in the hall afterwards drinking our coffee. Suddenly I saw Abdul enter, and he came straight up to me. 'Are there any orders?' he said."

"Now, that again surprised me. Here was an ordinary dragoman, whom I had employed twice only, coming for orders. I did not then understand in the least degree what it meant. I merely told him that he had been quite satisfactory, and if he wished I would write in his testimonial-

book, but that I was doing no more sightseeing for the present, and should not require his services. And I gave him a small tip. He put it down on the table. Next morning he was squatting outside the hotel, and rose when I went out as one's servant rises. He sat there all day, and when he was given a job by the porter of the hotel he said he was engaged. That evening again he came in and asked for orders.

"That went on for nearly a week. He refused to go up the Nile with some rich Americans as dragoman on their dayabeah, saying he was engaged to me. Eventually I asked him what it all meant. 'The order has been given me,' he said; 'I am the servant of the effendi. You will give me no wages, but board and clothes—what I require only.'

"To the English mind this was distracting, and I sought advice. I went to Achmet Pasha, told him the whole story, and asked him what he made of it. He did not seem in the least surprised, and told me he had expected it. 'And if you do not give him board and clothes,' he said, 'he will starve. He will take no other work. He refuses to be a medium for me any longer. I think he is hungry already.'

"Then he burst out quite unlike the courteous Achmet we know. 'Fool, fool!' he said. 'Abdul has had his orders, cannot you understand that? He will black your boots, or do anything you tell him, but he has had his orders, to serve you, or to live with you as guest, or to go to the North Pole with you. Only he has got to be with you. The Power that he serves has commanded it.'"

Sir Henry paused again, and again the wind tore at the windows, like some distracted presence seeking admittance.

"He has been with me ever since on these terms," he continued. "I give him board and lodging and clothes, but he will take no wages. He does the ordinary work of a valet in a very efficient manner. And he is my constant medium: through him I communicate, as I told you, with the spirit of my wife. For three years I have been in continual communication with her, hearing her voice speak to me, but no more than that. And just now—an hour ago—Abdul has left me."

"Is it impertinent to ask why?" said Henderson. "If so, I do not ask it."

Then quite suddenly the wind fell entirely, and for the

moment there was a dead hush outside: it was as if the wind itself listened.

"No, not the least impertinent," said Sir Henry. "It is because I am determined to go further, to meddle with the forbidden thing, with what he calls Black Magic."

He sprang up.

"My God! my God!" he said, "it is only her voice that he can bring to me. And I would give my immortal soul for the sight and the touch. Her—it is her I want to see again," he cried. "A voice may be imitated—yes, that has often occurred to me. And I am afraid of nothing if I can get the complete realization of her presence. I will hear, I will see, I will touch. Ah, deaf and blindfold, I shall know the feel of her fingers. That will convince me: the sight of her will convince me, and by any means I wish to be convinced. Is not that a proper, a legitimate desire? And then I will go down on my knees, and sob out my gratitude to the eternal and invincible Spirit of Good!"

The passion that had lifted him upon his feet slowly subsided again, and the wind that had subsided rose again from crescendo through crescendo to a redoubled violence. In the room the darkness of the noonday grew to a portent. A grayish pallor of twilight, deepening in the corners and unlighted places to blackness, seemed to be pouring in from the closed windows, while outside in the garden the fronds of the palm-trees raised agonizing arms and let them fall again in terror, moaning and sighing as they writhed and struggled in the grip of the tempest.

Jim Henderson moved rather impatiently in his chair.

"Parting with a faithful servant is always a painful thing," he said, "if the man has served you well, and particularly if your servant has—has advanced you on the Way, if through him you have been granted spiritual experiences."

He paused a moment.

"But the Way is so dominant, so autocratic in its demands," he said, "that one has, so to speak, to kick ladders down behind one, even when one is really attached to those ladders, really grateful to them for their help hitherto if, in mixed metaphor, the ladder you have left behind, off which you have now stepped, interferes with your further progress. Nothing matters in comparison of truth, and our knowledge of truth. Abdul, if you will excuse my saying so, stands

dead in the way of your further progress, Sir Henry. He talked, for instance, so you have told me, of Black Magic. That is hopeless. We are all children in such matters; we none of us know. But if we refuse to go forward, if we say, 'It is dark; perhaps there is a bogie there,' we are worse than children: we are imbeciles. And whatever one's quest, imbecility is for ever and ever the one irredeemable sin. We can be wicked, and good may come of it, but we cannot be foolish, and expect wisdom to be the net result. Nor can we be cowards, and hope vaguely that our act of cowardice may be the parent of bravery."

He got up with a quick, light movement, an agility which suggested great physical strength in spite of his slim, slight figure.

"So you have dismissed Abdul," he said, "or, at any rate, have accepted his own self-dismissal. I congratulate you. You have probably, Sir Henry, never done a wiser thing, or a thing more in accordance with your highest welfare. Now, personally I fear nothing: I only want to know. Are you willing to take hands with me, and come in search of knowledge? The knowledge you want, as of course I see, is the knowledge, the conviction, of the continuance and certain immutability of love. Will you follow up whatever hints we may gain with the ruthlessness of a bloodhound? I don't know any more than you what will happen, but my theory is that all that happens to us is consequent on action or thought of ours. Will you, in fact, do and think without fear? We are going to try a strange experiment in trying to raise the spirit of Set-nekht and seeing what he can do for us. But chance or fate has put into my hands this amulet, and I am going to see if there is anything in it. The chances are that nothing will happen. Well, if so, we shall have wasted our time. But there is a chance that something may, in which case we may possibly be running some risk. But, after all, what do you and I matter?"

This last question was to one of Sir Henry's temperament full of a moral compulsion. That life should be given freely, be poured out like water, for the sake of the faintest, bleared light of authentic truth was a commonplace to him. According to his whole theory of existence, the individual mattered so very little (especially if the individual in question was one's self) compared to the smallest addition to the precious

pages of the book of spiritual knowledge. He would, indeed, cheerfully have immolated himself on that austere altar if he had been assured that from his ashes would rise the faintest and most evanescent flame. And the appeal itself, as made him by this man much younger than himself, far more vigorous in the mere physical vitalities of life, made, too, with such insouciance and disregard of self, was strangely attractive to him. On the other side, it is true, was Abdul, with his three years of devoted attendance and his extraordinary psychical gifts. Yet here again the individual weighed light: here was a further possibility within the horizons—a possibility concerned not with the chance individual, but with everlasting truth. And without pause he chose.

"Fear is always evil," he said, "and if I hesitate it is from fear. But I do not hesitate any longer. I will find what can be found, I will learn what can be learned."

He paused a moment.

"But if we learn nothing from this," he said, "or if the learning seem to me a traffic with or a concession to something which is of evil origin, what Abdul calls Black Magic, at that moment I will stop. And I will ask Abdul, I will entreat him, to come back. Never yet have I seen so wonderful a controller, but you tell me that more is possible. As I said to you last night, then, I will seek with you."

Henderson threw himself back in his chair with a certain air of relief.

"I must honestly say I am extremely glad you have chosen so," he said, "because, really, I came to Luxor on the chance of your deciding to sit in séance with me. As you know, a certain homogeneity in the circle produces results which are unattainable if there is spiritual want of affinity, and I am sure that you and I together can insure a very favourable atmosphere. But—you will pardon me—I should suggest that at our first experiment, when, in fact, we try to set the Ka of Set-nekht free from the spell of the amulet, your daughter should not be present. I fancy she holds somewhat the same views about what Abdul would call Black Magic as he does himself—the Abdul heresy, shall we call it? Her presence, therefore, might perhaps interfere with our success."

Sir Henry assented to this.

"I should have proposed that myself if you had not," he

said. "Indeed, I shall not let her know that any experiment is going on, partly for the sake of the experiment, partly for hers. As you say, she holds Abdul's views about Black Magic. For that reason, I should suggest that we should, if possible, do it quickly, before she could guess we have made any arrangements."

Henderson smiled.

"Indeed, there are very few to be made," he said. "If, as I suggest, the breaking of this amulet will cause the Ka of Set-nekht to be loosed again—evidently he was a haunting spirit—we merely want to get a medium, and visit with him some spot which Set-nekht's Ka is likely to haunt, though we may, of course, have to visit several. Somehow or other, anyhow, we ought, especially with a good medium, to hook on to the Ka of Set-nekht. But you told me, I think, that the statue of this Ka had been lately discovered. Where is it?"

"It is still—or it was yesterday—in the temple of Mut at Karnak," said Sir Henry.

"Clearly, then, that is a good place in which to try the experiment," said Henderson. "We will go there this evening, if that suits you."

"Through this?" said Sir Henry, pointing to the blinded day.

Henderson shrugged his shoulders.

"I confess I am anxious to begin," he said.

"Very well. There is a man here whom I have used as a medium before, and, what is satisfactory, he has no fear whatever of Black Magic. He is also extremely sensitive."

Henderson rose.

"I will leave you, then," he said, "as there are certain things I want to think over, in order to give us the best possible chance of success. I have left the amulet in my room, I find, but I will show it you before this evening. I must also think out what precautions we must take in case of—an unusual experience coming to us; for one wants, naturally, to run no risks that can be avoided, though I tell you plainly I don't personally feel as if I was going to embark on a dangerous enterprise."

He paused and looked out of the window.

"If one believed in spiritual agencies affecting external Nature," he said, "one would be tempted to think that there

was something very uneasy going on to-day. By the way, Sir Henry, have you a barometer?"

Sir Henry stretched out his hand to a small leather case on the table.

"Yes: I have not looked at it. I should not wonder if it had gone down an inch."

He opened it, and looked at it for a moment in silence.

"It is set fair," he said. "It has not stirred since yesterday morning."

Henderson chuckled.

"That is strange," he said, "because my barometer also refuses to recognise the existence of this storm. I thought it might be out of order. But what about yours? That would be an odd chance, that yours was out of order too in some precisely similar manner. So let us say we don't understand it."

After Jim Henderson had gone, Sir Henry sat long in silent thought, trying in his own mind to stifle something within him (whether it was conscience or mere childish fear of the dark he hardly knew) that cried out against the course to which he had now committed himself. Again and again in wild bursts of entreaty it besought him to have no part or finger in this. "Black Magic! Black Magic!" it shrieked to him with the wild flutings of the wind. Yet when he sat down and soberly examined the ground of his disquiet, behold, there was nothing in the least degree reasonable there. There was nothing more evil in the mere breaking of an antique amulet than in the mixture of two drugs for a chemical experiment. Some new potency, it may be, might be evolved from it, just as some new by-product might be a chemical result of the mixture of the drugs. And whatever else he was, he determined within himself not to be superstitious: a new field of knowledge was conceivably being thrown open, yet he feared to enter. Why? Because Abdul had pronounced that the panic in the bazaar which he connected with the amulet of Set-nekht was of the order of Black Magic. In the same way, so Sir Henry now argued to himself, a savage, seeing for the first time an express locomotive drawing its huge train of carriages at speed hitherto inconceivable to him, would certainly pronounce this mere machine of steel and steam to be some devil. When he knew more, however, he would know that there was nothing what-

ever inherently evil about it: it, to the more instructed, was only an application of natural laws that were at work everywhere in the world and at every minute: expansion produced by heat was but made a servant, made to work within limits of steel.

The illustration when it occurred to him was consoling. Abdul, an adept on his own lines, just as the savage might be an adept in the throwing of boomerangs, was here confronted with phenomena he knew nothing of, and he therefore labeled them evil. How strongly Abdul felt that might be gauged from his self-dismissal; but the parallel again held, for the savage would indubitably run away from the vicinity of the train.

Sir Henry was naturally a man of almost transcendental honesty, and he wished in this self-examination of the motives that had led him to throw in his lot with Henderson, and in the review he made of what lay before him not to stifle or extenuate anything. The first experiment he and Henderson were going to make consisted merely of the smashing of the amulet in séance, taking, it is true, as the scene of the séance, some spot which the spirit might naturally be supposed to have haunted before the amulet laid it. Yet surely, if any innate scruple held them back from this, so that he was conscious, as was the case, that he feared what might come, it was nothing but superstition that prompted that scruple. What, in fact, to proceed to the instance in point, could be more superstitious than to suppose that this amulet—this piece of glazed clay—was the repository of occult power? To take a sane view, indeed, what, as the probabilities went, could be more likely to destroy any latent germs of superstition than to submit this to the test? He was to go that evening to the temple where the Ka statue of Set-nekht had been found, and in séance there to see broken an amulet which, apparently, was made to lay the ghost of this three-thousand-year-old dead. Then, supposing that any result was theirs, what an addition to knowledge would be theirs also! On this possibility he hardly dwelled: breaking a piece of clay was all that might be definitely expected to occur, that and the waiting to see what might conceivably follow. Sir Henry guessed what would follow: the wind would whistle, the medium would eventually be awakened, and would say "Khalas," which means

"It is finished," and they would ride back to Luxor again, the medium, in all probability, insinuating that his services were worth twenty-five instead of twenty piastres.

Again—it was harder now—Sir Henry was honest with himself. Supposing by some remote, unheard-of chance the breaking of the amulet was succeeded by some manifestation, by some appearance or control, undreamt-of except by himself and Henderson, what should be his next step? And before he asked himself the question he knew the answer: for every fibre of his being demanded one thing—the visible, tangible materialization of his wife. As he had said, that to him would be the solution of the bat-like doubts that so constantly hovered round him, and by that his knowledge of the eternity of love, of the futile nothingness of death, would be crystallized and firm for ever. Whatever brought him that certain knowledge could not be evil: he would invoke the aid of any potency to bring him that.

Then suddenly, with a pang almost of regret, of remorse, his mind went back to the faithful servant who had left him only this morning. Abdul had refused to stop longer with him when he heard that he was going to attempt to meddle with that force which, so he said, had caused the panic in the bazaar at Cairo—the force, that is to say, resident in the amulet. Yet how fantastic a suggestion: for the panic, Abdul held, was a premonition. That instinctive terror of the crowd was due to the fact that once again a black and deadly soul would be recalled from silence and rest to its evil and haunting activities. Abdul had, it is true, guessed the further step—that is to say, that if the breaking of the amulet let loose on the séance the ghost, uneasy again, of Set-nekht, Sir Henry would go a step further, and ask, through the aid of that same power, to see and touch his wife. So much he was determined to do; yet he did not at this moment hope for the possibility. He believed—again honest—that the breaking of the amulet would have no effect, that they might as well break a stone from the roadside or a sprig of hibiscus. But if, if—

An interruption to his thoughts, not wholly unwelcome, came at this moment, and Ida entered.

"I want Abdul," she said. "Is he not here? The hotel people told me he was here. How stupid they are! We must counter-order all our plans for to-day and to-morrow.

No one could go out in this furnace of hot sand. Oh, this wind, it drives one mad! Where is Abdul, father?"

She sat down heavily in a seat, and pushed back her hair from her forehead. In this uncertain light, this veiled and bleared day, he could see but indistinctly, but she seemed to him to look ill. Her eyes, too, those lakes of violet, were dim and clouded, tired, and without their wonted lustre.

"Where is Abdul?" she said again, getting no answer to her question.

"Abdul gave me notice this morning," said her father. "I suppose he has gone down to Cairo."

Ida sprang up.

"And we are left alone here?" she cried. "We, you and I, and the wind? Why did he go? Has he left us, do you mean? And while this—this devilry is going on?"

Conscience or fear again startled her father.

"Devilry?" he said.

"Yes, this wind, this haunting sense of the ominous," she cried, getting up and walking restlessly about. "And Abdul gone: I feel as if a shield, a protector, had been taken away."

Sir Henry got up.

"My dear Ida," he said, going to her, "do not give way like this to moods which are entirely due to the weather. Sirocco gets on the nerves of all of us, I suppose, but one expects one's self as a responsible being to make an effort not to behave like a child."

But she hardly seemed to hear him, and shook her head, still looking out of the window with fearful glance, as if afraid of seeing some dreadful presence there.

"No, it is not that—it is not that," she said.

Sir Henry looked at her a moment with a little anxiety. Prey as she always was to the influences, benign or baleful, of sun and storm, of cloud or dewy brightness of morning, he had never seen Ida quite so far escaped from her own control as this.

"You are not ill, dear?" he asked; and again in a sort of moan—

"No, it is not that—it is not that," she answered him.

Before mid-day, however, the violence of the storm had a good deal abated, and after lunch it was possible for Sir Henry and Mr. Henderson to stroll out to tell the donkey-

boys that they would want animals that evening, and to secure the medium. This latter was a young fellow of not more than twenty, whose mediumistic powers Sir Henry had learned on his first visit to Luxor, now three years ago. Abdul had on this occasion tried him with the simple experiment of the ink-mirror, and found him extraordinarily sensitive to suggestion. Till this year Sir Henry had often employed him, but a few weeks ago Abdul had detected him in some small theft, and for that reason had refused to sit with him any longer.

"He is not honest," he had said, "and if he is not honest over piastres, he is honest over nothing. A thief cannot help us on the Way."

But not long after the boy had made an appeal to Sir Henry.

"I stole," he said, "it is quite true, but I was hungry, and my mother was dead. Oh, very wrong. But I can show you more curious things than Abdul. And I swear by my life and the life of my father I will not steal again. Abdul—Abdul, he hates me, because I can do more than him."

Sir Henry could not resist a further inquiry: his own opinion was that Abdul had been rather hard on the boy.

"What can you do, Mohammed," he asked, "that Abdul cannot?"

The boy looked quickly round as if to see that no one else was in hearing.

"Abdul, he afraid," he said. "I afraid of nothing—white or black, for it is all one. Abdul"—he waved his arms scornfully—"can do pretty little things for children. I show you magic for men."

At the time Sir Henry had merely laughed at this: it was Arab all through, and as transparent as need be. But later on certain confirmation of Mohammed's boasts had occurred, for one night shrieks of terror had been heard from the house where he lived, and a couple of Arabs had rushed out terror-stricken, saying that he had raised an evil spirit, who appeared with eyes as large as plates, and a face yellow like the moon. Certain it was, at any rate, that they thought they had seen something which frightened them nearly out of their wits, and Abdul, when referred to, was quite serious about it.

"It was the Black Magic," he said.

Mohammed was found among the donkey-boys at the outer gate of the hotel, where he was telling stories to the others with dramatic gestures. But in answer to Sir Henry's beckoning he sprang up amid cries of disappointment from his audience, and followed him. Black Magician though he might be, he was an extraordinarily engaging young fellow, olive brown of complexion, with a laughing eye and a mouth of shining ivory. He wore a crimson fez and a bright blue gabardine, tied at the waist with a gold-embroidered sash.

"Abdul no good at all," he remarked affably; "he went away by the train this morning. I see him off at station. Yes, sir."

Henderson smiled back at the boy.

"So you raised the devil the other day, did you?" he said.

"He doesn't seem to have been much damaged," he added to Sir Henry.

Mohammed grinned.

"That was not magic," he said confidentially. "I just made dreadful eyes of orange-peel and stuck them here. Those men they ran away, and I sat down and laughed. It was what you call joke."

But when the business of the evening was made known to him, Mohammed did not laugh at all, in spite of his avowed indifference to all colours of magic.

"I not like that temple," he said. "No Arab would go there after dark. There are ghosts there, real ghosts, not like mine."

"I thought you weren't afraid of anything, Mohammed?" said Sir Henry.

Mohammed shifted from one foot to the other, still shaking his head, and Henderson made the right suggestion at the right moment.

"We shall have to send for Abdul again, then," said he.

The Arab flushed under his brown skin, and spat on the ground.

"I will come with you," he said.

The storm showed further signs of abating, and before sunset the wind had died down to only a breeze, and behind the gray clouds the sun itself was faintly visible, but pale and unluminous, like a plate of tin. But the violence of the morning tempest, and her jangled nerves, had given Ida a

really severe headache, and when the two men returned to the hotel, they found she was lying down. Sir Henry, however, went to see her in her darkened room.

"Poor dear child!" he said, "but you will soon be better now. The wind has almost ceased: it has blown itself out."

Ida turned uneasily on her sofa.

"Yes, but it is coming on again worse than ever," she said.

"I feel it coming: it will be an awful night."

"My dear," said her father, "it really is clearing up extraordinarily. We have been out. Besides"—he hesitated a moment—"the barometer is quite high."

"It will come back," said the girl again. "I know better than the barometer."

She sat up with a dismal little laugh.

"And this headache is all my own fault," she said, "for allowing myself to get agitated. But when Sirocco comes I feel I can't help it. Yet I suppose if I sat down and did needlework, and took some long breaths, I should not get in such a state. But I am rather better: and I think I can go to sleep a bit."

"You won't come down to dinner, dear?" asked her father.

"No, I think I shall have something up here. I dare say I shall be all right again to-morrow. I haven't done any meditation to-day. But I could no more concentrate my thoughts than I could fly."

"Don't attempt it," said her father. "Spare yourself all effort for to-day. You are sure to be better to-morrow morning. Good-night, dear."

He kissed her gently on the forehead, and left her.





THIRD

ABOUT the time of sunset the wind ceased altogether, yet no relief came to the hideous oppression and heat of the air. Clouds gray and leaden-coloured obscured the sky, and the sun setting behind them flushed the West with a coppery glare. Yet no coolness nor refreshing breeze from the North succeeded, as was usual, to the lulling of the wind; only a stifled and unnatural calm sat heavy over the earth—a calm, it seemed, out of which must burst some terrific convulsion of forces.

Ida, as she had arranged, had a little food sent up to her room, and Sir Henry and Jim Henderson dined alone. Now that the hour was approaching, the former at least felt a certain nervousness and foreboding of evil growing like some night-reared mushroom in his mind, but, sensibly enough, put it down to this oppression of the air. Just before dinner he had examined the amulet with which the experiment was to be made, and had come to the conclusion, being expert in these antiquities, that it was beyond all doubt genuine, and, as far as his knowledge went, unique. This latter fact he felt bound to tell his companion: a hundred-pound note was certainly being thrown on the altar of investigation.

"Indeed, my dear Henderson," he said, "I cannot really consent to take part in this, unless you will be so good as to let me purchase it from you first at what, as far as I can judge, is a fair price."

Jim Henderson laughed.

"I gave twenty piastres for it," he said; "I am perfectly willing to accept ten from you if you wish, and we will thus go halves. In fact, Sir Henry, if you will pay for my donkey this evening, our score will be cleared."

"The British Museum would give you certainly eighty pounds for this," said the other; "it is, as I say, unique, and

of remarkable workmanship, wonderful glaze, and most beautifully engraved."

"Ah, but in no case should I have taken it to the British Museum," said Henderson; "whether you had been here or not, I should have broken it. Ten piastres is all my conscience will let me accept. Now, would you read it, please, to see if my reading agrees with yours."

The amulet was some four inches long and hexagonal in shape, of most brilliant colour, and very beautifully engraved, with the exquisite neatness of the work of the eighteenth dynasty. Sir Henry drew a sheet of paper to him, and very carefully made a transcription of the hieroglyphics. Five minutes more sufficed for the translation, and after running over it once more he read aloud:

"Set-nekht, overseer of the gardens and heifers of Amen, and chief over the slaves of Amen, and steward of the King Seti, who lives for ever, and builder of his temples."

"Seeing that the ghost of Set-nekht is unquiet, and haunts those that were his friends and those of his house, behold they have made great sacrifice of sheep and oxen to the number of a hundred in the precinct of the temple of the lake, so that his ghost may have peace, and be stayed from wandering. Therefore, as long as this stone shall endure there shall be rest to his spirit. And if this stone cease to endure, then shall he be unquiet again until love has made light of death, and is stronger than death."

Sir Henry read this, then got up quickly.

"The temple of the lake," he cried, "that is where we are going to-night: that is where they found his Ka statue only a few days ago! It is the temple of Mut in the horseshoe lake, of which also Set-nekht was the architect. Henderson, Henderson, what may not be before us?"

Henderson whistled low to himself.

"By Jove, we are in luck!" he said. "His ghost was laid in the temple where we propose to raise it again? His Ka statue is there too? Certainly one could not have better conditions."

He got up rather excitedly, and walked up and down the room, lighting a cigarette and throwing it away again.

"Now tell me what your arrangements for the séance are to be," said Sir Henry.

"I mean to take all possible precautions," he said. "Sup-

posing, supposing that we do succeed in materializing his spirit, we shall have to deal with something strange, I expect. Of course, it is a million to one chance against us. Still, there is that one chance, and, by Jove! I mean to make the most of it. Well, we shall all three of us be in the circle, and if *crux ansata* and Swastikas and Pentagrams—everything, in fact, which evil spirits are supposed to find hard to cross—are of any use, we shall be safe enough."

He paused a moment.

"Now, Sir Henry," he said, "I neither wish myself to run any risks, nor that you should run them. Therefore I ask you to obey me implicitly. After I have made the circle, which I shall make close to the Ka statue, we shall all three—you, Mohammed and I—get inside it. Then we shall get the medium into trance, and as soon as there is any sign of spiritual presence I shall smash the amulet, and call on Set-nekht. But from that circle you do not step till Mohammed is absolutely and completely out of his trance."

Sir Henry lit a cigarette, and his companion noticed that his hand was trembling slightly.

"But all this, the circle, the signs, do you believe in it?" he asked.

"I believe that we may be going to embark on an unknown sea," said Henderson; "at least, it is for that possibility we are going to the temple on this deadly night. Let us, then, be provisioned for all sorts of contingencies. You may say that it is impossible that cabalistic signs are of any use. I, in the same spirit, would answer you that it is impossible to raise this spirit. But as we think it worth while to try the one, we had better try the other also."

This, too, Sir Henry considered.

"I may ask questions?" he said.

"By all means—as many as you like."

It was soon after dinner that they set off on their two-mile ride for the temple in the horseshoe lake just outside Karnak. Mohammed, rather grave and nervous, was waiting for them outside the hotel gate, and they mounted their donkeys, he walking close to them, with head muffled against the wind, which had begun to blow fitfully again. But they could scarcely urge the beasts out of a foot's pace, and the heaviness and heat of the air were such that even at this leisurely going the sweat poured down Sir Henry's face. Soon they

passed outside the village, where, though it was still but little after eight, no one seemed to be abroad, and emerged on to the raised road between the low-lying fields. Though so heavy a blanket of clouds overset the sky, it was strange how much light filtered from the stars through that opaque covering, and objects many yards from them were distinctly visible. Then in due course they passed the English cemetery, where white gravestones lamented over the exiled dead, and, turning soon after to the right, crossed the strip of dried mud, curled like pancakes newly fried, that fringed the horseshoe lake, which lay gray and still before them, and went up the steep path to the outer courtyard of the temple. Round it, the result of recent excavations, were rows of cat-headed statues, similar to that by which they had dined in the Luxor garden the night before, sitting there grave and dark, like a congregation turned to stone, waiting for some magician-priest to wake them into life again. Just outside this courtyard they left their donkeys with the two donkey-boys, and the three entered the actual precincts of the temple.

Sir Henry led the way through this courtyard into the temple itself, followed by the others. The statue of which they were in search had been last seen by him on the outside bank of the promontory facing the lake, but they found it had been moved, no doubt by the Museum authorities, into the temple itself, where it now stood in the centre of the inner courtyard.

Sir Henry pointed to it.

"This is it," he said to Henderson.

Mohammed had said nothing whatever during the passage from Luxor, but here he suddenly covered his face in his hands.

"I am afraid—I am afraid," he said. "Something is coming. Make the circle quickly, effendi, and make it safe twice over."

Henderson gave a short laugh.

"Rather eerie, isn't it?" he said, glancing round. "And so that's Set-nekht. Well, we've come to wake you up, old man," he added, with a ghastly sort of gaiety. "You've had a long sleep."

Eerie it certainly was—a scene of awful and antique desolation. The temple had been very much destroyed, and the

walls of the temple building into which they had now passed were at the utmost not more than eight or ten feet in height. Down the centre ran a double row of broken lotus-columns about the same height; by the gate through which they had entered from the outer court stood, one on each side, two gigantic cat-headed figures, one much perished and defaced, and looking like some deformed and mutilated animal. The floor had not been as yet completely cleared, and drums of columns lay about, while close to the Set-nekht statue was a group of four hideous statues of baboons, erect on their hind-legs, carved in black granite, about six feet in height, which seemed in this dim light to be executing some sort of infernal minuet. But of all the traces there of a bygone and mysterious ritual, the statue of Set-nekht himself was the most terrific. He knelt grasping an altar in his arms, and a cruel, sensual face smiled above it—a face full of the knowledge of dreadful things, strong and satyr-like. And round them was the desolate emptiness of sand, a hot and windless calm broken from time to time with a sudden buffet of air that seemed to come from nowhere, a pallor of dim light.

Henderson examined the statue a moment longer, after his rather grimly humorous salutation of it, and then with a trowel proceeded to his work. The earth was soft and sandy, and he dug a circular trench some three yards in diameter. Round it in the sand he cut the symbols across which and between which no malignant spirit may pass, and as he worked the sweat poured from him. Ever apt and quick with his hands, the mystical signs were carved with extraordinary speed and nimbleness, and as he worked he talked to himself with the same rather ghastly gaiety with which he had addressed the statue.

“Yes, *crux ansata* at the corner,” he said, “so that, if the old man thinks he can get in there, he is jolly well mistaken. Then he’ll go on, and find a couple of Swastikas stopping his way there, and, really, if he’s at all like his statue, we don’t want him inside. He doesn’t look a very pleasant old fellow, does he, Sir Henry? Perhaps his sleep may have put him in a better mood, provided he doesn’t get out of bed the wrong side.”

“Ah, don’t, don’t,” said Sir Henry suddenly. “I can’t jest about it.”

Henderson resumed his work in silence, and toiled on for

some minutes. Then he looked carefully at what he had done, and got up.

"That is enough," he said.

Sir Henry stood by while this was going on, struggling with himself. The thought of Abdul, the thought of all the simple and gracious manifestations he had seen with him, the thought of Abdul's horror of all this sort of thing, this black work, pulled one way, but on the other side was knowledge, the possibility of learning something new, and behind all and above all the possibility of seeing his wife. That was the predominant factor, and for years he had indulged that wish so passionately that the truth was that nothing now had really power to hold him back. And he acquiesced in going through with it, come what might.

The voice of Henderson again roused him.

"We will step inside," he said in a most matter-of-fact tone, as if he were referring to a house or a paddock, "and you do not move outside, Sir Henry, till you receive my spoken permission. I have your promise."

Then he turned to Mohammed.

"Sit down there," he said, "and look steadily at my eyes."

Again there was absolute silence, and two or three minutes passed. Then Mohammed's eyes closed suddenly, and his head dropped forward.

"Take his hand and mine," said Henderson to Sir Henry.

Again dead silence: then suddenly Mohammed began moaning softly to himself, and his slow breathing changed to sudden short pants for breath, as if he was pursued or was frightened.

"It is coming, it is coming!" he said, his voice rising suddenly into a scream.

There was a sudden stir in the air, and, though they still sat in windlessness, some current high above them began tearing the clouds asunder, and the whole scene grew gradually lighter, as the stars began to appear through the torn fleeces of the clouds. The walls of the temple, covered with hieroglyphics and bas-relief, stood out plainly; the apes-statues grew more grotesquely horrible, as they faced each other for their dreadful dance; and close beside them, just outside the circle, leered and grinned the cruel features of Set-nekht. Then there was a sudden sound as if from somewhere close beside them, muffled hands were clapped to-

gether, and a sharp angry voice near them said a couple of words which neither recognised.

At that Henderson took the amulet out of his pocket, dropping hands with Sir Henry, laid it on a stone, and with the handle of his trowel hit it with all his force. Twice it resisted his blows, only jumping from the stone where it was laid, but the third blow shattered it to atoms.

* * * * *

Ten minutes after they had left the hotel, Ida came downstairs. Her headache had gone, but she was feeling unaccountably tired and heavy, and preferred to sit for a little while in the garden, to catch any wandering breath of coolness that might be stirring. On her way out she inquired for her father, and learned that he and Henderson had not long ago set off for a ride.

At this she went, not into the garden, but to the gate of the hotel, where a few donkey-boys were squatting, and asked if anyone knew where her father and the other gentleman had gone, intending, perhaps, to go out a little way to meet them. She was answered at once.

"To horseshoe lake with Mohammed. Oh Black Magic. You take my donkey, lady."

And next moment she was cantering after them, bare-headed, tired and oppressed no longer, but full of terror, a nameless terror that would not be put into words.

* * * * *

In the temple after the smashing of the amulet, there was silence again, except for the low moaning of Mohammed. Then again came the beating of muffled hands. This time they were much louder, and again a babble of strange words sounded from close at hand. For a moment Henderson thought he recognised one or two of them. Then Sir Henry spoke.

"Who is with us?" he said. "Be seen, whoever you are."

He heard Henderson take a sudden deep breath, and saw that his eyes were fixed on the statue of Set-nekht, which stood outside their circle, between it and the gate into the courtyard. Sir Henry turned his head to where Henderson was looking.

Behind the statue there shone a faint radiance, coming, it

would seem, from a bright spot invisible to them. The light, whatever it was, did not give the impression of being fresh or clear: it looked stale and impure. This grew slowly brighter, and slowly in the illuminated air there began to form white vaporous lines, intertwining with each other, and growing every moment more distinct. Simultaneously, even while they watched, there sounded the dry pattering of hoofs not far away.

Every moment the hoofs sounded nearer, every moment the shifting intertwining white lines began to take form. The body, tall, a woman's body, grew rapidly more definite in this boil and whirl of dim light; arms bare to the shoulder were stretched out on each side of it: then above came a face, framed in golden hair, violet-eyed.

Sir Henry took one long breath and sprang up. Round the gate of the courtyard there ran in a white-clad figure, crying "Father, father!" Then Henderson's tones rang out peremptory and stern.

"Don't for your life go outside, Sir Henry," he cried.

But Sir Henry heard nothing: he saw only that smiling and beloved face; with the cry of the lover joined again to his beloved, he sprang towards it, as it held its arms out to him.

Then the phantom face changed suddenly, the curves of that beautiful mouth grew fierce and sneering and sensual, the eyes started and leered inwards in a horrible squint; the whole face was a mask of virulent evil, the replica of the face of that statue behind which it appeared, but vastly more terrible, more potent, more vitally evil.

Then Henderson saw Sir Henry throw his arms out as if to keep off that dreadful vision, and next moment he fell forwards, as Ida, with a stifled cry, went on her knees before his prostrate body.

Henderson shook Mohammed by the shoulder with both hands and wrestled with him like a man demented.

"Wake, wake!" he screamed. "Wake! it is done: it is finished!" and again he shook and tore at him.

Mohammed gave one long shiver that passed through all his limbs, and his drooped head raised itself.

"It is finished," he said, rubbing his eyes.

At the moment that the boy came out of trance the phantom figure vanished, and Henderson sprang outside the circle to the two who were there.

Ida was bending over her father, kneeling by him, in the attitude in which she had flung herself by him as she rushed through the gateway of the courtyard. But her eyes were bent not on him, but were directed upwards and inwards towards the place where the terrible face had been. At that first moment, when Henderson took one step to them, she seemed half dazed, her hands groped blindly in the sand, and she looked, not at her father, seeming not to know he was there, but upwards and inwards, squinting frightfully. As for him, he lay prone, face downwards; he had barely, it appeared, crossed the circle; one foot, bent under him, was outside it, the other was still inside. But instantaneously Ida came to herself, and her blind groping fingers sought her father: her eyes for the first time looked at him.

"Ah, Mr. Henderson, what has happened? What is it?" she cried.

Suddenly the wind that had sounded only overhead came nearer. The defeated battalions of clouds fled from the face of the sky, and the glorious company of stars shone out. The crescent moon had an added lustre as of day, the white temple showed clear in that wonderful twilight of night; and clearer and more ghastly the black baboons trod their measure, and clearest of all leered and grinned the stone mask of the temple's architect. Mohammed, now completely awakened from his deep trance, was the cheerful, merry Arab again.

"We go back now?" he asked. "Will the effendi give me fifty piastres? There was very good magic to-night. I am tired!"

"Go and fetch the donkeys in here at once, Mohammed," said Henderson.

Sir Henry lay face downwards on the ground; Henderson turned him on his back and felt his pulse, and in answer to an unasked question he replied to Ida.

"Not dead nor anything like it!" he said. "He has fainted merely. He had a shock, a surprise. Where are we? Where is the lake? Yes, lay him flat. Now a little water!"

He climbed over the high wall and ran down the steep

bank to the lake. Then he filled his hat with water, came back and dashed it over Sir Henry's face. For a moment they waited in silence. Then he stirred, and suddenly sat up.

"Where am I? What is happening?" he asked.

Henderson was close beside him, and as his eyes began to search again for the familiar objects of life, he stood up, screening from him the statue of Set-nekht.

"You fell, Sir Henry," he said. "You tripped over some stone."

Sir Henry looked round vacantly for a moment.

"You here, Ida?" he said.

Then his voice rose sharply.

"You were inside?" he cried. "Tell me you were inside."

Ida looked across him at Henderson, who nodded to her.

"Yes, dear," she said, "I was inside. It is all right. Really it is all right."

Her father sat where he was a moment longer breathing heavily.

"Let us go back, then," he said.

He rose slowly, as if stiff. Then his eye fell on the inscrutable, grinning statue.

"You devil! you devil!" he cried, and suddenly losing all his self-control as the memory of the horror that had preceded his unconsciousness came on him in full flood, he beat with his hand on the statue's face.

"And Mohammed—where is Mohammed?" he shrieked. "What has happened? I saw her, and it was not she. It was something else, something terrible that hates me. Ida, you were inside?" he cried.

For a moment she turned a bewildered, hopeless glance on Henderson. Then her courage and her woman's instinct came to her aid.

"Yes, dear father," she said. "We were all inside—we were all—all safe," she hazarded at a guess, and looked for confirmation to Mr. Henderson. And to his nod of approval she continued.

"You have dreamed something, father," she said. "Nothing happened; indeed, there was nothing. Ask Mr. Henderson, ask Mohammed. Ah, here is Mohammed with the donkeys."

That cheerful jingling of bells and trappings perhaps did more to restore Sir Henry than any words could have done.

But a moment after there was not one of them but started and cowered, for with a shriek and scorching heat, for all that the stars beamed so coolly overhead, the full force of the Sirocco was again upon them. Sheltered though it was by its high banks, this horseshoe lake grew white with foam, and a cloud of sand, palpable as a man's hand, drove over the temple. In a moment the clear starlight was expunged, the air was thick as Thames-valley fog, smarting, too, and biting to the skin with the driven sand. All earth and heaven vanished in that maniacal storm: to attempt to see meant a blinding, and of hearing there was nothing possible; for the wild shriek of the maddened air drowned all else. Darkness as of the nether pit obscured everything, and they felt their way to the shelter of the gate of the temple courtyard.

Of them all, as they fought their way back to the village, Sir Henry was the only one who seemed to suffer nothing from the unspeakable uproar. Sheets of rain, hot and steaming, a portent to this latitude, swept the earth, turning their road into liquid mud. Lightning flickered above them, and thunder replied, instantaneous and deafening. More than Sirocco was loose.

Drenched and blinded they arrived at length at the hotel door. All round the entrance lanterns were swinging, half of them every moment extinguished, and the next moment relit. The whole population of the village was huddled together, it seemed, to await their return, and panic reigned there. Some mysterious force was abroad, the muttering, frightened crowd showed that, and when they arrived, it was as if some storm-wrecked vessel had, almost beyond expectation, gained the hardly-won beach. That mysterious terror had spread beyond the Arabs, and mixed with the crowd were English visitors waiting out in the pouring tempest to see them return. For, in the secret, inexplicable way of the bazaars and the crowded villages of the Nile, they had hardly been gone half an hour before it was known throughout all Luxor that some dark incantation was on foot in the temple of Mut, and though none dared stir a step out on the road, yet none dared go to bed until that mysterious ritual, whatever it was, was over.

But at the sight of them returned, the whole crowd broke

out into sobbing relief, broken phrases of thanksgiving, and prayers for the averting of evil. Even as at the eclipse of the moon, half the men assembled there carried drums and rude wind instruments, which they beat and blew for the frightening away of the malignant agencies that all knew were abroad to-night. Mohammed had melted away into the crowd of natives, willing to wait, apparently, for his wages till the morrow, and Sir Henry, getting stiffly off his donkey, walked rather unsteadily into the hotel, leaning on Henderson's arm, and followed by Ida. She looked deathly pale and tired, but, so thought Henderson, strangely unmoved. She showed, it seemed to him, no more concern or anxiety for her father, her mouth even had a bitter little smile on it, and her eyes, an effect, no doubt, of the dancing crooked shadows cast by this crowd of lantern-bearers, seemed to him to be strangely expressionless. Also they did not look quite straight in front of her, but a little inwards.

They had come to the door of the hotel itself, still in silence, when suddenly up the mimosa avenue from the river came the sound of steps running swiftly. Next moment a man in a black gabardine, drenched to the skin, threw himself at Sir Henry's feet.

"Pardon, pardon!" he cried; "I have sinned, I have erred from the way, I left you in anger, effendi. You are safe? You are safe? I should never have gone—oh, I should never have gone."

Sir Henry looked at him quietly.

"So you have come back, Abdul," he said.

He passed his hand over his forehead, frowning.

"There was something I wanted to say, Henderson," he said, "but I can think of nothing to-night. I am so frightfully tired. Good-night. Good-night, Ida."

But Ida made no reply, and stood there, quite still. Henderson looked at her a moment, then followed Sir Henry down the passage to his room. But Abdul, whose eyes had fallen on her, remained where he was, his breath coming and going quickly, and blanched to an awful pallor below his brown skin, looking at her with some speechless, nameless terror.

Then Ida took a step towards him, and spoke very quietly.

"Abdul . . .," she said, "I had gone to fetch him home,

and I was outside the circle in which they were sitting. And just as I came to him, It, whatever it was, turned and looked at me; and that look," she said, touching her forehead, "entered here. It was cold and hot together, and black."

Still Abdul said nothing, but looked at her with the same terror and an entreating tenderness.

"It was nothing," he said, stammering. "Indeed it was nothing."

The girl shook her head.

"I feel half stunned," she said. "I shall want to see you in the morning. And I think I must ask you to give me your arm. I am so tired I can hardly move."

At her door she turned to him.

"Good-night, Abdul," she said.

The door closed behind her, and in his drenched clothes he stood in the passage. Then he lay down quietly across her door, so that none could enter. All night he lay there, never closing his eyes, but below his breath all night he whispered the name of God with ceaseless iteration.

Morning dawned soft, warm, and incredibly calm: all the portentous riot and tumult of the wind and storm was over, clear blue sky was spread from horizon to horizon, and a light north wind blew up the river; only the wreckage of trees, the beaten-down plants, and stripped stems spoke of the blind furies that had swept over the earth. And even as it was but a few hours' work for the gardeners to restore order to the paths and sweep away the broken fragments of leaves and branches, so for the mercurial, merry people of Egypt a little conversation in scattered groups was soon sufficient to carry away that strange panic and fear that had run through the village the night before. Thoroughly characteristic, too, was it of Mohammed, that he was one of the earliest to wait at the hotel gate for the exit of any of his party, since last night he had really quite forgotten to get his pay. He was ready, too, this morning to bargain, to wheedle, and if necessary to hint dark things to any extent, in order to secure as much as could possibly be extracted from the English lord. Of what had happened the night before he had very little remembrance: he knew only that before he had gone into trance he had been most hideously conscious of some very imminent presence and peril, and that on re-

turning to it he had the sensation of being dragged back from some immense distance out of some frightful horror of darkness. So this morning his common-sense told him that there was very strong magic present, "and the stronger the magic," thought Mohammed to himself, "the more should be the piastres."

He had just arrived at the agreeable conclusion, when Abdul came out of the hotel enclosure and looked round. Seeing the boy, he beckoned him inside.

"Take it," he said—"take the wages of blackness. But if ever you speak to the effendi or to the lady again, I will kill you. I will kill you with my hands, strangling you, you dog!"

And he dropped into Mohammed's hands five English sovereigns, turned his back on him, and went again into the hotel.

Now, Mohammed's wildest dreams of avarice had not conceived this golden result: in his most sanguine moments he had only gone so far as to suppose a fifth part of the sum was within the possibilities, and, Arab-like, restless and never contented, he sought counsel within himself as to what this could mean, and, since this fortune had dropped into his hands without any effort on his part, he considered whether, since money was so plentiful to-day, he could not manage to increase his own share in such amplitude of wealth. Never before in all his sittings with Sir Henry had more than a tithe if this been his pay for much longer hours, and he argued that perhaps the new gentleman was the benefactor. This was ingenious, and also fell out conveniently, since Abdul was a person not given to speaking lightly, and Mohammed had not the slightest desire to meet his doom. So, with all this spinning in his brain, and his five pounds already securely tied up in a corner of his vest, he sat down again, prepared, if necessary, to wait all day for the chance of a word with the new English gentleman.

By degrees the hotel began to stir and emerge: scenes of indescribable riot and confusion over doubly-ordered donkeys occurred at the gate, and to east and west, and south and north, the visitors rode off for their day's amusement or exploration. Some were going to Karnak, others across the river, others to see the newly-discovered statue of Set-nekht

in a small temple at the horseshoe lake. But Mohammed's eyes—he having successfully sub-let his donkey for the day—were ever fixed on the gate, waiting for the advent of the new Englishman. At length, among the rest, came familiar figures: Sir Henry and Ida came out together, Henderson was walking a few paces behind them, and last of all, bearing a basket of lunch, came Abdul. Sir Henry started slightly as he met the young Arab's black glance, but he passed down to the river without speaking to him. Ida passed him, too, without apparently seeing him: then came Henderson, whose eye Mohammed caught. But at the moment Sir Henry turned and said something to his friend, and all three went on together. But Mohammed did not move: some swift sense told him that Henderson wished to speak to him, and he sat there looking down the road where they had gone. Nor had he to wait long: in a couple of minutes Henderson came back alone, and beckoned him out of the throng of tourists and donkey-boys into the hotel garden.

"Be here this evening, Mohammed," he said, "and wait till I come. I may get out soon after dinner, but I may be late. Anyhow, wait till I come. I shall have another job for you."

"Yes, sir," said Mohammed. "And will you pay me for last night? Last night I went home without the backsheesh. I was tired."

Henderson felt in his waistcoat pocket, and produced a sovereign.

"You can earn more than that if you are good," he said. "You did very well last night."

And he turned again and went quickly after the others.

Truly it was Tom Tiddler's ground this morning, and Mohammed tied his added riches in a different corner of his vest, and swaggered out again among the donkey-boys.

"That is my friend, and he is the richest lord in England," he said. "He will take me to England when he goes back, and give me a horse to ride, and a wife to cook my dinner. I shall drink wine, too, every day. Then next year I shall come out to Luxor and beat the dirty little heads of all the donkey-boys with my gold stick."

The others meantime were sailing across the Nile to the sand-bank on the other side, where their donkeys were wait-

ing for them. A cool and crisp north wind blew gently upstream, but with force enough to send their light boat along at a pace which made rowing unnecessary, and caused the severed water to rise in a little feathery frill at the bow. A wonderful sunlight was overhead, caressing and mellow, and seeming almost to penetrate the landscape of hill, desert, and growing crops. Father, daughter, and guest had all met at breakfast that morning in the garden, congratulated themselves on this delicious change in the weather, and quite naturally arranged to take their proposed expedition of the day before to the temple of Deir-el-Bahari. Sir Henry in particular was completely his courteous, equable self, affectionate to his daughter and charming to his guest. Ida, too, found, apparently, no obstacle in the road of normal behaviour, but all the time she was conscious that somewhere deep inside her, as if it had soaked in during the night and left the surface, there was some secret spot of horror. She knew, too, that Abdul's eye as he served them was drawn back again and again to her, and that he watched her anxiously. None alluded directly or indirectly to the scene of the evening before: by tacit consent it was buried. Yet all the time each knew that it must some time have its resurrection: none, however, could face the discussion of it at once.

The temple of Deir-el-Bahari lies on the edge of the desert, and rises in three terraces against a great cliff of red-gray limestone that separates the plain in which it stands from the valley of the Tombs of the Kings. Excavation was in progress there, and some while before the party got to it they could see that an excitement of some sort was going on, for the workmen were all collected at one spot, swarming and running to and fro about it, like ants when their hill is disturbed. Coming closer, they could hear the confused murmur of many voices talking at once, punctuated now and then by the authoritative tones of some overseer.

Ida had been riding in front with Henderson, who was asking her a question or two about the temple they were coming to see. Their donkeys, great white animals, standing almost as high as an English cob, were much faster than those of Sir Henry and Abdul, and their steady lobbing canter had far outdistanced the others. They had but lately noticed how far they were ahead, and had just reined up to a walking pace.

"It was built by King Seti," Ida was saying in reply, "and is full of most interesting things. In one of the halls is carved the story of the expedition he sent to the land of Punt, and there are pictures on the walls showing the embarkation of his boats, bringing back with them heaps of frankincense, and apes, and bars of gold, and giving in exchange beads and necklaces, just as people barter now with savages. That is on the second terrace. As you see, there are three."

"And who built the temple?" asked he. "Who was the architect?"

Ida looked straight in front of her.

"It dates chiefly from Queen Hatasoo," she said. "The architect, I believe, was called—no, I forget his name. But the really interesting thing about it is the work of a man called Set-nekht, and it is in the chamber where his life and deeds are recorded that all the crowd are working now. Perhaps they have found something. It would be odd——" And she stopped suddenly. "Let us wait for my father here."

But before they had waited very long, they saw a man in English dress riding swiftly towards them in the direction of Luxor. He recognised Ida and drew rein for a moment.

"Good-morning, Miss Jervis," he said. "There has been an accident, I am sorry to say, and a column has just fallen in the hall of Set-nekht, pinning two workmen underneath it. I am riding to get a doctor. One is killed, I am afraid."

And he put his donkey into a canter again and rode on.

Ida had answered nothing, but Henderson looking at her, saw that her breath came and went quickly, and that her teeth were tight closed on her lower lip as if to control a cry that almost escaped her, and they waited in silence till Sir Henry and Abdul joined them.

Henderson explained what had happened, and without another word, but only a speechless avoidance of the looks of each other—for each knew well what was in the minds of them all, and shunned to see the suggestion in the eye—they turned back again. Then after a time Sir Henry recovered himself, enough, at any rate, to find speech.

"It would have been impossible to go there, Mr. Henderson, would it not, after—after all that has happened?" he said; "but if you wish you can visit Medinet. Personally I

think, if you will not consider me rude, I shall go back to Luxor. It is rather upsetting, and I do not feel quite myself this morning. But I hope you will take an expedition with my daughter and Abdul: it is a pity that you should lose so beautiful a day."

Abdul cast one glance of a sort of mingled hatred and terror at Henderson.

"I go back to Luxor with you, Sir Henry," he said bluntly.

Henderson's excellent adroitness bridged over this rather awkward moment.

"Of course, of course," he said; "and you, Miss Ida? I see you are terribly affected too, and no wonder. Now may I take a little lunch from your basket, and with my Baedeker explore Medinet, and anything else neighbouring. I assure you I shall enjoy a day of quiet study; you have no idea how terribly ignorant I am of these antiquities. And to-morrow I hope we may perhaps all make an expedition together, when I shall be perhaps a rather less backward pupil."

He chattered on with great tact and naturalness, until he had definitely parted from them, they taking the road back to Luxor. Then, followed by the donkey-boy, he cantered off towards the temple in which he was to spend the day of quiet study.

His proceedings subsequently, however quiet they might be, were not immediately studious. As soon as he was out of sight of the rest of the party, he stopped his donkey, found a convenient yard or two of shade beneath some bushes of tamarisk, removed some awkward fragments of stone, and, stretching himself comfortably on the sand, proceeded to think. He had plenty of food for thought, and that rather rare gift of being able to think consecutively without a wandering mind.

Coincidence! How futile and meaningless was the whole notion of mere coincidence! It was as if a man should say that it was by coincidence that the thunder followed on the lightning. No: every circumstance that can happen in this world, as he had said to Sir Henry, is an arc, however small, of a circle, a link in a chain, and no more set there by chance than it is by chance that the goldsmith forges and adds link to link in the necklace he is making. Already in this strange, mysterious adventure, begun so unexpectedly a

few days ago in the bazaar at Cairo, there were several links lying heavy and solid in his hand. What were they exactly? What was their full significance, and to what might they be expected to lead? In particular, what exactly had happened last night?

First, then, he had come across this amulet, which, according to its own account, was commemorative and symbolical at any rate of the laying of the ghost of Set-nekht. With it he had come to Luxor to find that discovery had just been made of the statue of this same spirit. They had smashed the amulet in a place which the ghost might be supposed to have haunted, the temple, that is to say, of Set-nekht's building, where originally the ghost had been laid by sacrifice, having present a most extraordinarily sensitive medium in a state of deep trance.

Henderson sat up, with his head in his hands. He wanted to note exactly what his own impression had been of that which followed. Disturbances of a very extraordinary kind had taken place, that smiting of muffled hands—hands, so he pictured them to himself, swathed in the cerements of the dead—that voice from somewhere close beside them but outside the circle, and that growing luminousness behind the Ka statue. Out of that a figure had built itself up, the face of which he had not at once clearly seen himself. But Sir Henry, beyond all doubt, had mistaken it for his wife, and, unable to resist, had risen to go to it. At that moment it had become clearer to Henderson: it was beyond doubt the face of Set-nekht. That Sir Henry had, it would seem, perceived too, and had fallen forward, but not wholly outside the circle. At this moment there had rushed up his daughter, close to this dreadful manifestation, and altogether unprotected. She had seen something, too, something which for the first moment or two she stared at with surely a dreadful squint, unmindful, unconscious even of her father, who lay stretched beside her on the ground.

Here then, they had perfectly clear evidence, the evidence of three persons that some materialized spirit had appeared on the breaking of the amulet which for thousands of years had laid it. That spirit now was unquiet again, it was once more a haunting spirit. To Sir Henry, for a moment at least, it had taken the form of his wife: that, of course, might have been due to his own intense desire to see her: it

might, on the other hand (though he had himself called such an idea an old-wives' tale) have been an impersonation on the part of the evil spirit, taken up, possibly, with the purpose of getting Sir Henry out of the circle. His daughter, however, had at that very moment come near to it, unprotected: that, perhaps, was enough for it, and it showed at once what it truly was.

Henderson found himself almost smiling at this: it was too fantastic for him, yet certainly it fitted in admirably with the circumstances. To continue:

The spirit of Set-nekht was loose again: it had perhaps already begun to take possession of Ida. It was busy too, full of active evil—fresh from its long waiting under the threshold. For this morning a column of his building, and inscribed with his deeds, had fallen, bringing death.

Now, the materialization of a haunting spirit was, as Henderson well knew, no easy experiment, or one on which success was likely to wait, except after long and repeated efforts, and often and often he had thought himself handsomely rewarded if, after a whole series of séances, he had been able at the end to get a materialization at all. Yet here at the very first séance, and almost as soon as the medium had gone off into trance, the phenomenon had occurred. Circumstances, of course, had been extraordinarily favourable: they had been at the very place where the ghost had been originally laid, the amulet stated specifically that its peace was dependent on the existence of itself, and he had, he was sure, got hold of a medium of almost unique sensitiveness. The combination at any rate had proved extremely powerful, and it remained to find out how, so to speak, both he and Ida "stood" with regard to Set-nekht's ghost, and to conjecture how, supposing it had already taken possession of the girl, the future would shape itself.

Then a sudden impatience, parenthetical to the consecutive flow of his thoughts, came over him. How much fuller, how much richer in experience his life would be, if only there was not this haunting question of money always with him! How, if he were richer, he would ransack this mysterious land for mediums, for forgotten secrets, for marvels which should reveal the ancient wisdom of the ages, as miners delve for the hidden riches of the earth. Even those who,

like Sir Henry, were very assiduous inquirers, who, like him, had practically no limit to what they might so profitably spend on the subject, were so uninventive, so narrow and elementary in the fields of their inquiries. Sir Henry, for instance, if he only chose, could employ a whole staff of men to search systematically through these ancient primeval villages, testing, inquiring, bringing to him their results, unearthing who knew what ancient and magical lore, yet not miss a farthing of what they spent in the work. And here was he himself, who cheerfully spent every farthing not demanded by his frugal living, on the subject which seemed to him more worth investigation than anything in the world, already wondering if he could afford to take Mohammed down to Cairo, and conduct a series of séances there, possibly even take him to England, which in the present state of interest in occult matters might turn out a good investment. Just the want of a few lumps of yellow metal would be what stood in his way, if he found he could not manage it.

Then suddenly a plan, a policy flashed remotely like reflected lightning through his busy weaving brain. He himself, in conjunction, anyhow, with Mohammed had almost without effort raised this ghost again. It was conceivable that by virtue of his raising it he had some authority over it. And it, so it was also conceivable, had begun at the very moment of her utterly unlooked-for but extraordinarily dramatic entrance into the temple to take possession of Ida:





FOURTH

TO-NIGHT, again, just as forty-eight hours ago, the three had dinner in the hotel garden, served by the noiseless ministrations of Abdul, and an intimate friend even of any of the three might easily have thought, to judge by the quiet ease and perfectly natural conversation of all of them, that the horizon of each, mental, spiritual, and physical alike, was absolutely as fair and unclouded as it was two days ago. This point struck Henderson as extremely dramatic: earthquake and convulsion had occurred, storms and horror beyond all power of description were, he knew, reigning in the breasts not only of his two companions but of the silent-footed Arab who was always at one's elbow, even before one knew that one wanted something. Yet in externals there was practically no change at all from the dinner of two evenings ago. They did not, it is true, during the meal talk on psychical subjects, speaking rather of more obvious and superficial interests; but Sir Henry was the same courteous host, with regret for the unavoidable interruption to their expedition to-day, and hope that Henderson had enjoyed his ramble, though solitary, among the other temples. Ida, perhaps, was a little more silent than she had been before, but there was nothing noticeable about it: it would not have occurred to a man that anxiety or suspense of any sort lay behind her sparingness of speech, for her mouth was ever on the brink of a smile, and her eyes often rested with interest on Henderson when he spoke, and with affection on her father. Her beauty, too, and the extraordinary charm of her face certainly were in no whit eclipsed; to Henderson, indeed, perhaps from growing familiarity with her, it seemed that he had not half realized how full of suggestion her loveliness was. She, too, was apologetic, yet sanguine that he had enjoyed his day; but when she spoke to him directly the

first time, he was conscious that it cost her an effort: she had to pull herself together. But she was quite successful in doing so, and the effort made, the feat of speech was smoothly accomplished, and her manner was quite light and natural.

"Really, I was very considerate this morning, Mr. Henderson," she was saying. "I really wanted to come with you, but I know myself so well how, perhaps, the best days of all among these temples are those when one is quite alone—anyhow, when one is not obliged to talk, and if I had come mere politeness would have necessitated that. But when one is alone one gets the atmosphere unmixed, and nobody asks one to pass the salt at the moment one, perhaps, is trying to project one's mind back three thousand years."

Henderson looked at her with his direct dark gaze. His mother had been an Italian, and he had that lucidity of eye which is so characteristic of the South. His face was of that spare, strong type which looks immensely in earnest whatever occupies its attention, and made his interlocutor feel that he was devoting his whole mind to the subject in hand. He smiled back at her.

"It is horrible to say it, and you must forgive my rudeness," he said, "but when it was settled that I was going to spend my day alone, I was really rather glad. It is exactly as you say, I entirely agree—it is impossible to be safe if there are other people with one: they may whisk one back by the mere mention of salt, at the moment one was sinking down, down, like a stone in the well of years."

Then for the first time an echo of last night sounded.

"The well of years," said Sir Henry. "What are years, when in ten minutes one can reach back to and realize what has been dead——"

The echo was heard by Ida, too.

"Father, father," she said, her voice a little raised.

Then the dreadful make-believe that nothing had happened began again: horror had peeped out for a moment, like a lizard from some crevice of a wall, but it was gone again as soon as it appeared. Someone praised the admirable toilet of roses on the table-cloth, and the name of one particular copper-coloured blossom was debated; sugar-growing was for a moment on the tapis; Sir Henry, who had a great aptitude for figures, told them how many extra

millions of acres would be brought into cultivation by the dam at Assouan; and the relative advantages of the system of poor-rates as compared with the custom of giving to beggars, were skirmished round. But after dinner, when coffee had been served, the veneers of polite society suddenly cracked off, blistered and consumed by the heat within, and the real wood appeared beneath. A somewhat long silence, so to speak, was the immediate cause of the crackling. Sir Henry during this had been playing nervously with his coffee-spoon: suddenly he dropped it on the cloth, and leaned forward: the breaking-point had come, the tension could not be longer borne.

"Mr. Henderson," he said, "Ida and I have been sitting here in this garden all day, seeing only horror in each other's eyes. We have been afraid to question, we have been afraid to talk. We have sat and looked at each other and wondered, making, as we have been doing at dinner, dreadful little attempts to speak of the hundred other affairs which it would otherwise have been natural for us to talk about. I cannot keep that up any longer, so let us have it out at once. Now, what happened?"

Ida looked at him anxiously.

"Had you better know to-night?" she said. "Mr. Henderson, he has had a bad headache all day, and I am sure he is feverish. He thinks he caught a chill last night, and he has had malaria very badly several times. Would he not be wiser, if what you have to tell us is agitating, not to hear it now, but to go to bed, and take his remedies, and go to sleep—try to go to sleep."

A sudden awful shrinking look, such as was in his face last night, when that dreadful transformation of the phantom took place, started into Sir Henry's eyes.

"Till I have heard," he said, "I could no more sleep than I could pray. I would sooner know that my worst fears were true than bear this deadly uncertainty. So tell me. Or first I will tell you what I thought I heard and saw."

He paused a moment and moistened his mouth with a sip of water, for it was as dry as the sand of the desert.

"I heard hands," he said, "which sounded muffled, twice clapped together. I heard a voice twice speak a short sentence which I did not understand. Then I saw a growing light behind that statue, and gradually in the middle of it

white weaving, interlacing lines fashioned themselves into the figure of my wife. Her arms were stretched out to me, for me her lips smiled, she beckoned to me with her eyes. And if all the powers of heaven and hell," he cried, "had at that moment tried to hold me back, I should have been stronger than they. I sprang up and took, I think, one step towards her, but at that moment, and in the space of a second, her face changed."

Sir Henry paused, and with his handkerchief mopped away the cold sweat that stood thick on his forehead. Then again he took a sip of water, and went on.

"It was as if the actual head of the statue from behind which the figure rose had come to life with all the evil of which the sculptor had shadowed the merest hints and suggestions, incarnate and living on it. There was some commotion and bustle at the gate of the temple, I fell back in horror, and I suppose lost consciousness, for how long I don't know. When I came to myself, Ida and you were by me; the temple was otherwise empty."

Henderson looked up at Ida. For a moment, as Sir Henry described what he had seen, she had shudderingly hidden her face in her hands. But her weakness, that involuntary shrinking, was but momentary; she recovered herself at once, and one thought only was in her mind—the desire to help and bring comfort to her father. So when Henderson looked up at her, he found that her eyes, those pools of pure violet, were fixed on him with eager intentness, and she almost imperceptibly shook her head. But her meaning was as plain as if she had shouted to him, and he took it.

"My impressions were rather different from yours, Sir Henry," he said. "I heard what you have described, but when the figure appeared the face to me was dim for a time, but when I saw it—clearly, after you had seen it—it was, as you say, the face of Set-nekht, and—and not a pleasant face. The moment you fell I awoke the medium: the appearance—I think we may call it the materialization of Set-nekht—vanished, and a few moments afterwards Miss Ida appeared on the scene."

Sir Henry gave a long, deep sigh of relief.

"You mean the presence had gone before she came?" he said.

"Certainly."

Then another thought occurred to him, and he turned to Ida with a puzzled look.

"But last night, Ida," he said, "surely you told me you were inside the circle."

She had made up her mind that the all-important thing was that her father should believe that no evil could have come to her, and to secure that she would have told any falsehood if that would screen the truth from him. And here her woman's wit was quick.

"I know, dear father," she said. "I do remember saying that, but I did not stop to think. You asked me whether I was inside the circle. I, of course, then did not know what circle you meant. I only saw you were in an agony to know if I was safe. I merely wanted to tell you I was safe. Again I tell you that."

"You promise me that, you really promise me that?" he asked once more.

If he had asked her to swear by all she held sacred, she would not have hesitated.

"Yes, indeed, indeed, it had gone before I came," she said. "Mr. Henderson has told you so, too."

Suddenly Sir Henry's eyes grew dim with unshed tears, and he raised his hands to his head.

"Ah, what a lesson I have had!" he said, "and, oh, how gently, how mercifully given! I knew I was doing wrong: I knew—I had been warned more than once—that an evil spirit might take her form, and my carnal, yes, my carnal desire to see her was such that my faith was swamped like a cockleboat in a tornado. Oh, thank God, thank God!"

He sat quite still a moment; then he shivered very violently from head to foot.

"And now I will take my quinine, and hope to go to sleep," he said. "You will excuse me, I am sure, Mr. Henderson: it does not do to neglect the warning of these attacks. I am afraid that without doubt I am in for one."

He went indoors with Ida, and Henderson, though he knew that Mohammed was waiting for him at the hotel gate, though he was all eagerness to again raise, if possible, that image of terror that had appeared last night, lingered still here in the cool fragrance of the garden. After the telegraphy of eyes that had passed between them, he knew that

question and answer, some discussion, must also pass, and from his own point of view he was more than willing that it should, for such a talk could not fail to advance their intimacy. And to do him bare justice, his policy of this morning was not utterly cold-blooded, and it was no forced or unwilling tribute of attraction and admiration that he paid her for herself. And even since this morning his admiration for her, like a river with rain in the hills, had risen enormously, for above all qualities almost he respected bravery, and just now she had been superbly brave—*splendide mendax*. Not a quiver of an eyelash, not a faltering over a syllable, not a tripping word on the tongue, had betrayed the complete lies she told, yet all the time she knew that, if there had been danger last night it was she who had been exposed defenceless to the whole brunt of it: it was on her that brutal malignancy had been poured in flood, pent up as it had been for all these years. Yet no thought of personal danger had made a quiver in her voice; her sole thought had been for her father; for him the whole of her address had been unflinching. She was the person most damaged in this frightful accident, yet she attended to the hurts of others, disregarding her own wound, which might yet be mortal.

Henderson had not long to wait, for in a couple of minutes he saw her emerge again from the hotel, and come straight to where he was sitting. White-clad, she came moth-like towards him past the sombre and ghostly shrubs of the garden. But as she passed that cat-headed statue from the temple, he thought in the dim light that she shuddered. Yet her bravery did not falter now: she had gone through worse than this to-day. She held out her hand to him.

"Thank you very much," she said, "for backing me up like that. My father must never know. Now, Mr. Henderson, I want your advice, and if possible your help."

She sat down by him.

"Something last night entered," she said. "Entered, do you understand, for I can't describe it otherwise: there is no word except that—it entered. I don't know what it was. That moment is to me now like some terrible dream which I can't remember, but which I know has some deadly import. All I can remember seeing is a frightful mask of

a face, which hovered just above the statue, and round it played some pale light, some flame. But it was no real flame, unless it was a flame of hell. All the time my father was lying face downwards close to it, but only that flame really concerned me. It lengthened out quickly towards me, as you can pull out dough, and it touched me, like some dreadful hot slug. I felt no pain, only a sickening helplessness: it went in and in, through here, between my eyes, till it got to the very centre of my being. All last night, all to-day, it has remained there, lying still, so I figure it, for the present, and just looking round. And all I know is that it is no dream: the thing happened. It is a sober, deadly reality, this nightmare."

She paused a moment, still quite mistress of herself. Then she turned to him again.

"What am I to do?" she asked.

Now, Henderson knew perfectly well that there was no use in merely trying to soothe her with empty assurances, or arguments that such a thing could not happen, that Sirocco had excited her to a supernormal sensitiveness. Instead, he treated her with the simplest frankness.

"I don't know enough about the appearance last night to be able to tell you anything for certain at present," he said, "but I am going to-night and to-morrow, if necessary, and for as many nights as is necessary, to the temple to find out more. Honestly, I do not believe that any spirit can take possession of one unless one voluntarily admits it, though one may easily imagine that it has done so. So don't allow yourself to imagine that: fight that idea of yours by every means in your power. And do not so much fight it consciously as distract your mind from it: if you find you are beginning to think about it, turn your thoughts deliberately elsewhere: think of anything sooner than it. One knows how possible it is to work one's self into a state of mind that really is dangerous."

Ida shook her head.

"What does it matter whether I think of it or not?" she said. "As you see, I am not hysterical or agitated about it; that, I know, would be worse than useless. But it would be also useless not to face it. For it is here."

"That is just what you must not allow yourself to say," said Henderson. "And don't, if you really wish my advice,

dwell on kindred subjects, on anything that would be likely to lead your mind back to it. If I were you, for instance, I should give up meditation altogether. It is putting yourself into the same field with the other."

Ida looked at him in surprise.

"Surely that, prayer and meditation, is the one chance I have," she said. "It is in them that my real chance of safety lies."

"No; my advice would be to drop everything psychical altogether for the time."

Ida was silent a moment. Then she rose.

"I am keeping you," she said. "I think it is brave of you to go back to that place again." And she shuddered as she spoke.

"There is no danger at all," he said. "And I shall be most sincerely thankful if I can help you in any way. But if one comes to talk about bravery——" And he held out his hand to her.

Sir Henry was very much worse the next morning. He had passed a feverish, wakeful night of intermittent dozing and disordered dreams, and had sent for his doctor as soon as Abdul called him in the morning. His temperature was then found to be alarmingly high, and, a symptom which Dr. Nares did not at all like, he showed very marked signs of cardiac weakness. What exactly this fever was could not be pronounced as yet for certain: it might conceivably be a severe attack of influenza, but when Dr. Nares had been told of his two previous attacks of malaria he looked grave, and shot out a solemn underlip.

"And two evenings ago," he said to Ida, "your father went after dinner to the temple of Mut, I think you said."

"Yes. And he got wet through coming home."

Dr. Nares nodded.

"I have not forgotten your return," he said dryly. "I was at the gate myself. I should like to ask you one question about that. Did anything occur which agitated Sir Henry very much? His state suggests to me that he has had some great shock."

Ida looked at him directly.

"Yes, he had a great shock," she said, "and some hours of great anxiety. But all cause for that is now removed."

The doctor nodded.

"I am glad to hear it," he said, "and we must trust to the recuperative powers of Nature to restore his strength. Well, Miss Jervis, I have given his servant all directions, and I will visit him again before lunch."

Ida made a great call on her courage.

"Please tell me how serious it is," she said. "Do you consider him very ill?"

The doctor appreciated this, and did exactly as she asked him.

"He has very high fever, and he is in a very weak state," he said. "I had better tell you that he may at any moment become very ill. But now that his anxiety is removed, we have reason to hope for the best."

"I may go and sit with him?"

"Certainly, by all means. There can, after what you have told me, be no doubt that he has a return of malaria, which, as you know, is not conceivably contagious."

Sir Henry was lying propped up in bed, and turned his head wearily as Ida entered. His eyes, for all his tossing, troubled night, were bright with fever.

"Poor, dear father!" she said, "it is wretched for you. Are you feeling dreadfully uncomfortable?"

He smiled at her.

"Ah, dear girl," he said, "if only I could tell you what an extraordinary peace and happiness has come to me."

He stretched out his hand to her.

"Oh, Ida, Ida," he said, "what a merciful escape has been allowed me! what a lesson, how soul-searching, has been taught me! For two days, as I have told Abdul, there was nothing I would not have done to get the sight or the touch of her whom I long for day and night. And I deceived and hoodwinked myself; I told myself that that would strengthen and confirm my faith. It was not so."

"How, then, dear father?" said she.

"It was a longing of the flesh," he said, with a sudden rising agitation and trembling of his hands.

She came closer to him.

"But surely, dear father," she said to quiet him, "that cannot be wrong. It cannot be wrong to long very intensely for the presence of someone whom one has loved."

"But I had that," he said, his voice rising again. "She was always present with me; her presence was more real than the sun. And in spite of that I wanted something lower—my hands so yearned to touch her, my lips to kiss hers once more. To get that I was willing to use any means, means that I knew were wrong."

He paused a moment.

"I do not blame Mr. Henderson or judge him," he said. "I do not believe he was acting against his view of what was right. But I was, and it is the motive of an act which determines its nature. And she said I should see her again this month. I persuaded myself to think she meant that. But I know now she did not. She meant something else—something else," he repeated softly.

Abdul had been sitting by the window. He rose noiselessly, poured out the medicine the doctor had left, and came to the bedside with the glass.

"It is time, effendi, for the dose," he said.

Then, raising his eyes, he met Ida's, and like an electric spark instantaneous and deadly, the dreadful knowledge that they were concealing from her father leaped backwards and forwards between them. Then, taking the glass from his master's hand after he had drunk, he suddenly stood up straight with a quivering lip, looking not at Ida, but in front of him. Great beads of sweat started out of his forehead: the man was in an agony.

"I have deceived," he cried, "and I have lent myself to deceit. And there is no peace here or hereafter for such. The Way commands me."

Ida had sprung up.

"Abdul, Abdul," she shrieked, "no, you must not."

But he seemed not to hear her, and turned to Sir Henry, while Ida sank down again with hands raised in agonized pleading.

"No, no," she moaned; "he is ill, not now."

Abdul drew a long breath, and the sick man turned his head quickly to look at Abdul, with a foreboding and dreadful anticipation in his eyes.

"She was there," he said. "She was close to it, whatever it was, outside the circle."

Sir Henry had been lying very still, very inert, but at this he sat up with a sudden convulsive movement, his eyes filled

with terror and a nameless horror, his hands plucked at the bed-clothes.

"What, what?" he cried. "You, Ida, there?"

Then he suddenly put his hand to his heart, and fell back on the pillows.

Dr. Nares had gone straight from Ida to the breakfast-room, and had hardly yet begun, when Abdul rushed in.

"Come, come!" he said. "Sir Henry!"

A minute later the doctor was bending over his bed, listening for his heart.

"When did this happen?" he asked quickly.

"Just now, two minutes ago," said Ida. "Is he—is he——"

"No, he is not dead. Go to my room, Abdul, and fetch the case that stands on my table, just as it is."

He turned to Ida.

"Did he have some sudden shock?" he asked.

"Yes."

"It is very serious, Miss Jervis," he said, "and I am going to inject ether. His heart may not respond. There is, however, a certain chance that it will bring him round. That rally may be temporary, or it may be, so to speak, permanent. Now, if he comes round, can you in any way reassure him, mitigate the shock he has had, counteract it?"

Ida looked at him quite directly.

"No, not in the smallest degree," she said.

"Is the sight of you likely to agitate him further?"

She cast one long look at the unconscious face on the pillow.

"Yes, I will go," she said. "But I will remain outside, and if he wishes to see me, you will call me."

Abdul returned at this moment with the case for which the doctor had sent him, and Ida went out into the passage.

It seemed to her, as she stood there waiting, that all power of thought, all power of feeling even, had been taken from her. She supposed it was she who stood quite firm and dry-eyed out in the long dim passage, but there was, so to speak, nothing in her sensations by which she could identify herself. An acquiescence, helpless as that of a bound and condemned murderer, had possession of her, and though she

had at the moment so passionately tried to dissuade Abdul from uttering the word which had caused this seizure, she felt as if it had to have been uttered. Great forces, the lords of life and death, had been putting them all like pieces at chess into their places; rebellion, even regret, was hardly possible; these decrees that were being executed were so huge, so inscrutable, that she felt she could only watch what was being done with the puppets that acted.

Then suddenly Abdul, who had remained in the room, opened the door, beckoning to her, and she entered. The doctor was standing by the bed; her father, with eyes half closed, was lying flat: the pillows had been taken away. Ida bent over him.

"Yes, dear father," she said.

Twice he tried to speak, and the doctor whispered to the girl.

"Suggest to him what he wants to say; he is sinking fast."

Then human love, his sweet tenderness and care for her all these years, came to her aid.

"Dear father," she said again, "it was not your fault: it was nobody's fault. So there is nothing to forgive. I almost wish there was: I should so love to forgive you anything."

His eyelids fluttered a moment, and his hand made a quick trembling movement toward hers, but he was already past speech.

Ida's beautiful mouth quivered as she spoke again, and her eyes grew dim.

"So you will see her, dearest, again this month, even as she told you. We know now it was that she meant. And you will wait for me together, and never cease to pray for me."

The grasp of his hand slackened, his eyelids closed again. There was one long painful effort to draw breath, and then he lay perfectly still.

* * * * *

Ida knelt there long, and when she rose she found the doctor had gone and Abdul was there alone. That fit of passionate sobbing which had seized her after she saw what had happened had passed entirely, and she spoke to him quite calmly.

"You were right to tell him, Abdul," she said, "and if ever I regret, you must remind me that even at this moment I said you were right. He knows now."

The face of the man lit up.

"Yes, he knows," he said. "Praise God for His abundant love, who has taken him into the everlasting peace."

The girl was silent a moment.

"You must never leave me, Abdul," she said.

"Except if I am bidden to die for you," he said. "The ordinance that was laid upon me to serve is still there. Till the end, which is the beginning, I am your slave and your servant."

All that day Ida saw no one, for she wanted to be alone and try, at any rate, to grasp clearly within her mind all that had happened within the last forty-eight hours. At first she felt dazed, unable to concentrate her mind on any one thing; it was as if a newspaper had been put into her hand, and in every column she saw something of vital and of horrible import: she could not at first read one paragraph, because of the others that caught her eye. But death in itself seemed to her, used as she was all her life to talk with and to talk of those beyond the veil, as if they were actually present, to be a thing not horrible at all, scarcely even painful. True, for the constant daily intercourse there would be substituted—for never for a moment did she doubt that she would be able constantly to communicate with her father—the less frequent intercourse, but the latter had to her a preciousness of its own. It was without other distractions: soul spoke to soul directly, without the intervention of that envelope of body. Dear though his physical presence had been to her, so dear indeed that, if she thought of that loss alone, she felt utterly desolate and lonely, she could not take death piecemeal like that; she had lost his bodily companionship, it is true, but she had gained that nearer and more intimate communion. Often in the long bright sunlit hours of this solitary day she thought of her father's repeated words that his wife's presence was constantly more real to him than was the presence of the people with whom he was sitting. And now even in the first hour of her bereavement Ida knew the truth of that. How could she, she wondered now, have been so weak and unworthy as to wish that Abdul should not tell him that which was the immediate cause of his death! That

indeed was materialism itself: tender as was her physical love for him, she knew that there was a finer relation between them, and one that would have been hurt, maimed, had he passed into life—real life—deceived by her. Truly in the midst of death there is life.

Thus it was with perfect naturalness that she made all the arrangements that had to be made. The rabbit-faced little clergyman came with beautiful set speeches for her: it struck him as such a wonderful coincidence that only two nights ago they should have been singing, "A few more years shall roll." He was, if the truth be told, a little shocked at Ida's unaffected fortitude, for he was ready with kind pressures of the hand and extraordinarily suitable reflections, which could hardly fail to console. He came, in fact, to offer her spiritual consolation and support, and was a little disconcerted at the fact that she seemed already supplied with what he brought her.

Then there were telegrams to be sent: she had only one near relation in the world, her father's widowed sister, who in the ordinary course of events would have joined them in a fortnight's time here. To her Ida merely sent the news, for there was no breaking of it possible, and suggested that she should still come out, and meet her, if this was not inconvenient, in Cairo. She telegraphed also to a girl friend of hers, Beatrice Montague, who was to have come out with her aunt: the rest of her despatches were addressed only to solicitors, business men, or acquaintances merely. The paucity of this somewhat appalled her: she had not yet realized how very lonely she had suddenly become, how large a percentage of the ordinary everyday routine of love and duty and happiness had been withdrawn. And then once again her fortitude failed her, and she sobbed herself sick.

The afternoon shadows were lengthening when she took up the burden again. She felt sure she had forgotten something all these hours. Then she remembered it, something dark, something that he, Mr. Henderson, had advised her not to think about. It was there still, lying quiet, perhaps, but it was there.

Then she remembered several things: she remembered a talk she had had with her father—yet it was scarcely a talk, it was merely a plan, an idea of his, which he had mentioned

to her on the morning after Mr. Henderson's arrival. She remembered, too, for the first time, that Henderson had gone last night again to the temple of Mut.

Abdul entered at this moment with letters. Some were addressed to her father, and at this, so little, yet so intimate a thing, she suddenly winced with pain. Abdul was watching her with loving, patient eyes.

"Ah, my lady," he said, "realize it by greater truths than the mere scratching of a pen."

"I know," she said, "I know. But it is these common things that hurt."

Abdul still looked fixedly at her.

"But we are not children," he said, "and——" His voice broke suddenly.

"Do not give way," he said; "do not let your real self give way. There are things—ah, it is better to face that—more difficult in front of us, than that which has happened to-day. Death? What is death?" he said. "I tell you it is just life. Just the beginning——"

Ida put the letters down.

"I wish to see Mr. Henderson," she said. "It is an order."

"No, never, never," he cried.

Then for a moment something cruel, something utterly unfeeling, dictated to the girl.

"So I suppose you will leave me as you left my father," she said.

Abdul started suddenly as if he had been stung or stabbed. She saw it: and all her best self condemned what she had said.

"Oh, Abdul, help me," she said; "there is no one left but you now."

Instantly all the intense, inspired devotion of the man sprang to the surface.

"Ah, not so, not so," he said, her previous speech instantaneously utterly expunged from his mind. "He, the effendi, will help you more than ever, more than he ever could before, for always his human love impeded the great love. He was like that. But is it an order?"

"Yes, it is still an order," she said. "It is concerned with a wish of his."

A few minutes afterwards Henderson came in. He retained her hand a moment longer than the meaningless everyday hand-shake would have enjoined, but neither he nor she thought words of sympathy necessary.

She motioned him to a chair.

"Mr. Henderson," she said, "two mornings ago my father happened to let drop to me that he hoped you would be his guest for a month at least, till we went down to Cairo again. He also hoped you would come down there with us on the dayabeah which was to meet us here in April. Please—please consider his wish as, not binding at all—the word is a bad one—but one which most naturally I should wish to fulfil."

There was a moment's pause: the inflection of her voice told him that she had not quite finished.

"I am sure you have questions of interest here," she said, "which occupy you. Do not shorten your stay. You were his guest: I ask you to consider yourself mine."

"I will do so," he said.

"Thank you. That, then, can be easily settled. It is crude, but simple."

She moved to her writing-table, took out a cheque-book, signed and dated the cheque, and left the rest blank.

"Thank you very much," she said.

She moved back from the table to the chair she had originally been sitting in.

"About last night," she said simply.

Henderson paused a moment, adjusting his trousers about his knees. Then he looked up.

"I saw it again," he said. "And I saw it more clearly. I tried to speak with it, but could not. But I think, I think," he said, "that I have a certain power over it. I shall find that out."

"How can that be?" asked the girl.

"I can tell you nothing for certain yet," he said, "but the fact that it comes so instantly when I call leads me to think that it is like a *genie*. You see, I broke the amulet. I called it into activity again."

A gleam of hope came into the girl's eyes.

"Pray God it is so," she said.

"Amen to that," said he.

Ida rose.

"I shall leave for Cairo the day after to-morrow," she said. "He will, of course, be buried to-morrow within the twenty-four hours. I think—I think he would like you to be there. After all, it was a part of him that we shall put to rest, a very small part, but yet one loved it. And I shall have roses planted all over the grave—roses and one piece of hibiscus."

"Of course I will be there," he said, "for, as you say, it was a part of him, and to that one wishes to say one's *Ave atque vale*. And that is a beautiful idea of yours. Roses, for the fragrance of his earthly life; one piece of hibiscus, the flower of flame, his soul."

Again they shook hands.

"And whatever happens, you will tell me," she said.





FIFTH

MRS. DESMOND, Sir Henry's sister and Ida's aunt, was gardening. This is an elastic term, often misapplied and misused, and has been known to be applied to the mere picking of sweet-peas or the cutting of a bunch of flowers. But Mrs. Desmond's gardening was of the sternest and most genuine description; the thick boots and thick gloves she wore were imperatively necessary for operations so thoroughgoing and laborious as those in which she indulged. She dug with a large spade huge holes for her beloved roses, she filled the holes in with the most delectable mould, she trod the earth about their roots with a large boot firmly planted; she was no lily-handed gardener. Or if weeding occupied her, it was no finicking job in her capable hands: the utmost fibre of the plantain was pulled up, the dandelion's tap-root was extricated entire. Even the more gruesome branch of slug-hunting was not shirked by her in the early summer days, when seedlings are tender, but with orange-skin, sliced potatoes, and the brine-pot she pursued her abhorrent mission. And the plants, so it appeared from their subsequent behaviour, fully appreciated the attentions of this large and wholly delightful woman.

But to-day no such dreadful business enchained her, for the month was November, and the skies poured down a gentle but extremely persistent dribble of rain, for which Mrs. Desmond was thoroughly grateful. In her rose-garden, shut in by its low red-brick walls, no breath of air stirred; it was warm, wet, and softly sultry. The minor inconveniences of such a day, as considered as productive of heat and wetness on the part of the labourer, were by her entirely disregarded. All that mattered was that never since the days of the original and primeval rose had there been

such an excellent afternoon for planting, and with spade and bent back and big boot and loving hand she planted.

At length even she was for the moment exhausted, stood up, and, stepping on to the grass path that bordered the bed she was engaged in, wiped with her spade huge clods of mud from her boots. A couple of feverishly-toiling gardeners, employed in cutting a new bed, did not, however, venture to relax their efforts for a moment. But she surveyed with a very kindly eye the progress that their work had made without very closely examining it, and eventually spoke to one of them.

"I have been to see your wife, Tom," she said, "and I went into every room of your cottage and opened every window. And if ever I see them all shut again, I will order that every second window-frame be taken out. Of course, she looks pale and run-down. She is being starved, not of food, which doesn't particularly matter, but of air, which matters very much."

Tom grinned rather sheepishly.

"She'll catch a worse cold, ma'am, then, in all them draughts."

"Not a bit of it. Such nonsense. It's shut windows that have made her weak and liable to catch cold. Also I found a bottle of cough-drops. I emptied them into the kitchen fire."

Tom, still faintly grinning, touched his cap, and turned his attention to his turf-cutting again. At the moment the long French window in the drawing-room of the house, which stood immediately above the rose-garden, opened, and a girl's figure came up the path towards where Mrs. Desmond had already begun digging another hole. She stepped rather daintily and disgustedly between pools of water, and had a smart silk umbrella up.

"Dear Mrs. Desmond," she said, "haven't you made enough mud-pies for the present? You've been making them ever since lunch, you know. I came out, which was very kind of me on such an awful afternoon, to tell you it is half-past four, and your guests will really be arriving before you can clean—I mean, dress yourself."

Mrs. Desmond laughed, a splendidly satisfactory laugh, head back, mouth open.

"Clean, clean," she said; "it's a good English word, and

exactly describes what I shall have to do. In fact, there is no other word for it, except scrub, which I shall have to do also. Half-past four, is it really? How time flies when one is really congenially occupied! And what have you done since lunch, Beatrice?"

"I went to my room," said Beatrice. "I shut the window, I lit the fire, I ate some sweets, I read a book for ten minutes, and I went to sleep for an hour. A warm, refreshing sleep. Oh, how *very* squashy the grass is!"

"Sowing the seeds of tuberculosis," remarked Mrs. Desmond, taking a glove off.

"I am afraid I am at this moment. And Ida has telegraphed that she will arrive this evening, instead of to-morrow. That is another thing that I came out to tell you."

"And the black man?" asked Mrs. Desmond.

"I suppose so: she never moves without him, does she?"

Mrs. Desmond's attention wandered, and was glued to the labour of the two gardeners. Her eye had caught sight of the pile of turfs they had cut to make the new rose-bed.

"Thick and thin," she said, with deep sarcasm: "some of the turfs are like slices of bread, the rest like the butter you put on them. Well, you had better get home, both of you. It does seem," she added, as a great concession, "to have been a little damp this afternoon. I really had not noticed it before. I was busy."

The other glove had come off by this time, and Mrs. Desmond went towards the house with Beatrice.

"Dearest Ida," she said, "and her black slave! I shall even be glad to see the black slave, since he implies Ida. And he certainly is most devoted to her. But black people always seem to me rather eerie, and I am apt to refer to them as niggers, which I am told is a most offensive thing to do. And the consciousness that at any moment I may do so makes me nervous in their presence. I referred to Abdul once as a nigger, and Ida got quite crimson. What a wonderful day for planting, is it not? And what a pity to go in! She said he was far more educated than any of us, and was probably of purer blood. So I hastened to add I was sure his blood was quite remarkable, and his education unique. I never mind climbing right down to the ground if I have made a mistake."

Again she laughed with jolly, kindly amusement.

"And tell me who else is coming to-day, Beatrice," she said. "I ask people, and if they say 'Yes,' I dismiss them altogether from my mind. They are all right, they are coming, but in the interval I generally forget who they are."

"Mr. Carbery, I think you told me," said Beatrice, "and Leonard Compton."

"How nice, not a party!" said Mrs. Desmond with satisfaction. "I was afraid it might be a party. Just five of us, so you four shall play bridge, and I shall be left in peace. There is a whole pile of bulb-catalogues which I have not read yet. I shall really enjoy myself. I never come across a novel which is half as entrancing to read as a really good catalogue of bulbs."

"You've got a party next week, you know," said Beatrice.

"I do; but I shall have put the garden to bed and tucked it up by then: also I shall have finished my catalogues and got the bulbs in. So I shall enjoy it immensely. Also Ida will be here to help."

"She is going to live with you permanently now, is she not?" said the girl.

"Yes, at last she has consented to do the reasonable thing. Dear Ida usually ends in deciding to do the reasonable thing, but she usually also takes time about it."

Beatrice laughed.

"Well, she has practically lived with you, after all, since last March," she said. "She has been doing the reasonable thing, though she may not have decided on it."

"Practically, perhaps. But she wouldn't say that her home was with me. She was taking me on trial, I suppose, and now she pronounces me satisfactory."

"You are the most satisfactory person I know," said the girl. Then she gave a little shriek, as Mrs. Desmond's extended arm threatened a caress. "But, dear Mrs. Desmond, you are so very wet at this moment. And—and, you know, you haven't cleaned yourself yet."

The scene of Mrs. Desmond's serious gardening was on the pleasant uplands of Sussex, some six miles from East Grinstead, a place remote and roomy. Straight in front of the house rose the heathery braes and sandy hollows of Ash-down Forest, over which industrious golfers from morning to night hunted for gutta-percha. She herself was Scotch by

birth, and hardly a day passed when she was here on which the pines, the sense of space, the ridges of tufted heather, did not bring back to her an echo of her land, and to-day, with its steady drizzle of warm rain, seemed to her peculiarly native. Her house, Tudor and Stuart in date, had also about it the same air of windy spaciousness that was so characteristic of the forest. The rooms were large and high and panelled for the most part, in plain oak, and with these excellent proportions and materials put ready for her, she had not obscured nor buried them (since the dish, so to speak, was admirably good) in excess of sauces in the way of curtains and padded surfaces. Her floors were of polished boards, with a few warm-hued Persian rugs laid down on them; her chairs were chiefly Chippendale, comfortable, but with outlines unspoiled by spurious show of comfort: each room in fact looked, to the eye mistakenly accustomed to consider cushions and padded edges as a sign of ease and warmth, as if it was furnished in a manner angular and cold; to the artistic eye, however, as Mrs. Desmond's quite undoubtedly was, they satisfied the wholesome desire for line; while to any experimentalist, artistic or otherwise, they turned out to be most delightful rooms to live in.

While she was in the country, however, Mrs. Desmond troubled her charming house but little. In London, it is true, she was an insatiable Londoner, and took, by reason of her invariable geniality, an especially prominent place in that gay and jostling procession which marches so untiringly from luncheon party to concert, from concert to dinner, and dinner to ball or evening party. But with her eye for fitness, her habits of London were left behind with her London clothes when she went down to Ryssop. The same, actually the same Mrs. Desmond would appear to her guests—it was no other woman, at any rate—but it was so completely another side of her that wrestled with roses to that which in London appeared to be, and was completely absorbed in the social kaleidoscope, that people were puzzled. Nobody, however, had ever thought of suggesting that she posed, or that in one of these aspects she was insincere. For insincerity and Mrs. Desmond were such hopelessly incompatible terms, that not even the most sanguine dissector of character and qualities could hope to find anything in common between them.

The garden, then, and not her delightful house, was her country-seat. Full south it faced, and if a flower was to be grown, Mrs. Desmond grew it. She was no general gardener, planning, however successfully, for vague and pleasing effects. The pleasing effects, such was her skill, were inevitable, but of vagueness there was none at all. She never "planted promiscuous," in the hope of discovering some good effect caught at venture from her original experimentalism. She knew, a virtue most rare in everybody, especially in mothers and gardeners, how young things would look when they grew up, and she made her arrangements (having duly enriched her beds) with the sure and certain hope of their doing so. She could tell you within a week when, for the last six years, the rose-garden was worth the visitor's eye; for herself, the rose-garden was always worth the eye, and, what is more, the pruning or the sulphur-sprinkling were, and the fruits of her care were hardly more delectable to her than the care she so freely lavished to obtain those fruits. But being many-sided herself, she allowed always for the absence of any particular side in her friends, and if *Beauté inconstante*, even in full flower, did not attract, there was the motor, the croquet-lawn, the bridge-table, always ready.

For herself, it is true, in the country, one thing existed and sufficed, the garden. Wars and rumours of war had less significance to her than that. Politics, which in London somewhat occupied her, for she was a redder Radical (disapproving of everything) than had probably ever been known to exist, were the echo of an echo to her here. True, if some guest insisted on winding the horn of politics, she would prick up her ears and champ the bit, for such an attitude was no more than what politeness indicated, even as a dog on the hint of biscuit will sit up or lie down, whatever his training may have inculcated; but plants, plants and animals, were the obsession to her here.

The garden was in three terraces. A broad gravel-path ran below the drawing-room windows and tubs painted white with black bands punctuated it at intervals. These tubs, which were one of the many trials of her gardeners, varied with the changing seasons, though their colours remained ever vivid. In earliest spring snowdrops and aconites made a brightness for the eye: then (other tubs being substituted)

daffodils danced together. In most years the daffodils danced till they were a little tired and wilted, for every gardener knows the inevitable pause that follows on bulbs. After that, however, the fun was fast and furious; it was but a question which tubs to wheel out from their nursery behind the greenhouses, where they stood in serried lines. Campanulas and Canterbury bells, with perhaps a brief prelude of Oriental poppies, and scarlet geum succeeded; Spanish iris followed, or was alternate and simultaneous, slightly formal, but exquisite in shape and unexpected in hue; then clematis, with its constellations of purple stars in a green heaven, writhed in ecstatic knots round the wires provided for its tendrils; turquoise delphiniums, the sun-flowers, phloxes, hollyhocks, evening primrose, salvias, dahlias, Michaelmas daisies, all clamoured for representation, through summer and early autumn, as if they had been aspirants for female suffrage.

The rest of this top terrace, as the imaginative gardener will have guessed, was entirely herbaceous. In the deep borders sloping downwards from the back, plants wrangled together and fought for precedence, yet with indulgence on the part of the stronger, for obscured growths put up sudden faces in lands that seemed inevitably to belong to another. Below and beyond lay the rose-garden, a desert of stunted bushes, so it seemed, to the untutored eye in the November of roses and of the year, and it was here that Mrs. Desmond had been at work this afternoon; and beyond that again a triumph of transition from garden to untutored Nature. For, like all successful flower-tenders, Mrs. Desmond was for ever pulling up; her progress through the herbaceous borders was like the march of an executioner, but never a single plant did she throw away unless it was dead, really dead. Instead, if its place in her borders was needed, the evicted vegetable was carefully dug up, and, like a horse that is past its work, turned out to grass, and the large meadow beyond the rose-garden was full of the overflow of her beds. At one time of the year it would be a carpet of forget-me-nots with clumps of budding daffodils and crocus; honesty blossomed and seeded itself at its will; bushes of lavender were fragrant in summer-time, and rambler rose thrust up its sappy stems in the hedges. Bamboos raised their tall feathered stems by the stream that ran

through it, and clumps of iris dabbled in the shallows. From there a hundred yards of grassy lane led on to the open heather of the Forest.

Mrs. Desmond had not yet appeared from the process of cleaning herself, and Beatrice was alone in the drawing-room when Ida arrived. The two had, in spite of Ida's long sojournings abroad, been the greatest friends since early girlhood, and Beatrice sprang up with an eager cry of welcome.

"Ah, Ida," she cried, "but it is good to see you! What ages you have been away!"

They kissed warmly.

"Well, that is all over now," said Ida. "Dear me! it is nice to have made up one's mind, and feel one has come home. All the way down in the train, all the way from the station, I had the feeling of home-coming, the thrill and warmth of home-coming, if you know what I mean. Abdul is pleased, too. Who is there here, Bee?"

"At the moment no one but Mrs. Desmond and me; Leonard Compton—the nerve specialist, you know—is coming this evening though, and Mr. Carbery."

"Ah, your cousin, is he not—Mr. Compton, I mean? But who is Mr. Carbery? I don't think I know him."

"You can't know him if you think you don't," said Beatrice. "He is the wholesomest young man in the world."

Ida drew off her gloves.

"That is a very good thing to be," she said. "A very good thing indeed. I've lived a good deal among strange people, but I never lost the taste for wholesome people. I want my nice white bread every day. Father was so aboundingly wholesome," she added.

Beatrice looked at her affectionately.

"I don't think you are really apt to disagree with people," she said.

Ida laughed, but for the moment a rather scared, hunted expression came into her face: it was easily interpreted, however, in her friend's mind as a very natural tiredness, for she had travelled all day.

"Ah, I wish I was quite certain of that," she said. "Sometimes I think I am full of dark corners. Little places under the stairs, you know, where dust collects. And you aren't quite certain what else may not be there on stormy even-

ings. Ah, here is the beloved aunt! Dear Aunt Julia, how nice to see you again, and to see you for always now! I was telling Bee that I have had the home-coming feeling all day."

Aunt Julia had cleaned herself to some purpose, having in addition put on a gorgeous brocade tea-gown, so that her clothing, like the King's daughter, was of wrought gold. She dressed quite magnificently in a certain big and regal style which suited her admirably. On other occasions, however, as has been seen, such as gardening, she was wise enough to dress as the nature of her occupation demanded, and wore things which her maid would have turned from with a contumelious lip, had it been suggested that she should clothe herself in the style of her mistress. She was a very large woman, and also extremely stout, but she held herself superbly, and moved with that ease and grace which make every motion a pleasure to watch.

"Dearest, dearest," she said to Ida as she kissed her again and again, "it is charming that you have come, and that you have settled not to go away again. Tea, how nice! Yes, Bee, give me a cup instantly with plenty of cream in it. And what was London like? One big mud-pie as usual, I suppose, peppered over with soot, and insufficiently lit by a bilious-looking plate which can have been nothing but the sun."

Beatrice poured out her tea.

"I thought, though I may be wrong," she said, "that there was a mud-pie in the garden this afternoon, and that you were wallowing in it. Only there was no bilious plate down here."

Mrs. Desmond looked at the buttered buns.

"That seems to me also rather a bilious plate," she remarked, taking one. "And have you brought the black man, Ida, and must I put up a mosque for him?"

Ida's smile died off her face: she became quite grave.

"Ah, you mustn't laugh at Abdul," she said. "He is a very important person to me."

Mrs. Desmond saw that Ida was serious, and became serious too.

"Yes, dear, yes, dear," she said, "and I know his devotion to your father——"

"And father's to him," said Ida quietly.

Trivial intimacies, the thousand and one little threads that have to be picked up again between friends who have just met after some weeks of parting, formed the staple of half an hour's talk. Ida had scarcely seen her aunt since the end of the London season, and had spent these last three months in visiting old friends, and making several new ones from among those acquaintances, the cultivation of whom had been so largely and constantly interrupted by her prolonged absences abroad. Aunt Julia, the kindest and simplest soul in the world, had also a good deal of that perception which if it exists alone may rightly be called worldliness, and she had urged this course on her niece with some earnestness.

"You see, Ida," she had said, "you have not really hitherto been at all like the ordinary English girl. You have lived with all sorts of strange, out-of-the-way people at all sorts of strange, out-of-the-way places; but now you have decided, dear, and I think quite rightly, to make your home in England. In that case you must spend a certain amount of your time over things which your father and you, perhaps, would call not worth wasting time on. You must go about to other people's houses, and for a certain number of weeks do nothing particular except make yourself pleasant."

Ida had turned an imploring eye on her.

"Dress? Politics? Golf?" she had asked vaguely.

"Yes, certainly, dress, politics, and golf," said Aunt Julia, "but not derisively like that. All the chatting, the frivolous conversation which you will hear and take part in is the symbol of something much more important—of kindliness, in fact, interest in your fellow-creatures, sociability."

"But what a waste of time!" said Ida. "And week after week!"

Mrs. Desmond began to find that her remark about the difference between Ida and the ordinary English girl was extremely true.

"Yes, dear, I know," she said. "You have been accustomed to spend all your time in deep and occult studies. But to think that all the gaiety and ripple of laughter which go on in the world is frivolous, shows, as I say, that you are not deep enough. It is all a symbol, an outward expression of very fine things, of humanity and affection for your kind. Besides, even if it were not so, which it certainly is, there is

some truth in the proverb about doing at Rome as Rome does. You must, even with the highest aims, adapt yourself to the people you will live with. Also you will find them very charming, so be a good girl. Do as I tell you, and spend three solid months seeing your father's friends. He had a great many, Ida. That was so wonderful in him; for though he lived abroad so much, he had more friends than almost any man I ever knew."

This evening Mrs. Desmond was delighted with the success of the plan she had advised. Charming as Ida always was, she had missed in her before that touch of instinctive amiability, of desire to amuse and to be amused, which was so characteristic of herself, and, to do it justice, is so characteristic of the world. Gravity, seriousness of purpose, and aim in life Mrs. Desmond would willingly have granted to be most excellent and important things, but she also rated very high the gayness and jollity of men and women, which, as she had said, she looked on as the sign and symbol of qualities which were hardly less excellent. And these three months seemed to her to have done a great deal for Ida in this respect. She had somehow gained a lighter touch, a more spontaneous gaiety, which was exactly that for which Mrs. Desmond had urged her to spend the autumn in other people's houses. And this added gaiety and geniality combined wonderfully well with that air of sincerity which had always been natural to the girl, and Aunt Julia told herself that certainly her niece was a person of immense charm.

Mrs. Desmond, when she had met Ida at Cairo directly after her father's death, had been, it must be confessed, somewhat shocked at what she had found. Ida was perfectly calm, she had never for a moment broken down, and this to her aunt, who knew her devotion to her father, seemed somewhat unnatural. There had been, as far as she knew, no outburst of grief on Ida's part, and this self-restraint, though admirable as a sign of fortitude, must have been a tremendous tax. Another thing, also, which she had not liked was that again and again, both during the ten days they had stopped there and on their voyage home, a sudden hunted look had started into Ida's eyes, as if the girl was fleeing from some horror that had sprung upon her from the shadows in her mind, with claws and teeth, ready to

devour. Sometimes that look would just pass like the shadow of a wind-blown cloud over her face, but at other times it would be there for an hour or more at a time. Then Ida would sit looking out over the ship's side, her book unread in her lap, with eyes of terror and mouth that quivered with some nameless secret. Often her aunt had tried to persuade herself that this represented Ida's inward struggle not to give way to her grief, yet as often she had to mistrust this interpretation. It was not grief that set her mouth quivering; it was terror. And yet death, as she knew, had no terror for her niece: it was something more terrible than death. Even when that look was not on Ida's face, the shadow of it was there; all day, though she might be talking of perfectly indifferent things, some part of her seemed to listen for the approach of that which would again seize and possess her: never for a moment was she at ease.

But to-night, though Beatrice had for a moment seen a hint of it spring into Ida's face when she talked with her before her aunt came in, there was no further recurrence of it, and Ida seemed to her most typically a charming and beautiful English girl. Aunt Julia had an innate horror of all that was queer and strange, and Ida seemed to her to show now no trace of the life which she had led with her father, which appeared to Mrs. Desmond to be very queer indeed. Ida, like the Children of Israel, had shaken off the dust of the land of Egypt and come forth from captivity. One trace, one legacy of Egypt alone remained—that silent-footed Arab. But Abdul, so Mrs. Desmond felt herself bound to confess, was an admirable servant. Even her own butler, to whom darkness of complexion seemed naturally to be synonymous with blackness of heart, had lost all his racial distrust, and had welcomed Abdul, on his return with Ida, with as near an approach to warmth as was consistent with his own exalted position.

Beatrice was not, at any rate, guilty of absurd exaggeration when she described Jack Carbery as the wholesomest young man in England. The word, indeed, could not have been more aptly chosen, yet the description was so obviously correct that it would have been imbecility not to have chosen it. He stood some six feet in height, was nearly as broad as he was long, and was devoted to every form of athletic exercise. His capacity also for laughter was amazing, and

his mouth, clean-shaven, seemed always to be smiling so as to be ready for the laughter which was sure to be not far off. He was not in the least clever, but he was even more markedly not in the least stupid, and brains very serviceable for the straightforward conduct of his life pursued their pleasant thoughts beneath the thick crop of rather curly hair. Just now his face wore an expression of ludicrous perplexity, for they were playing bridge, and for the moment he had quite forgotten whether that somewhat important card the ace of trumps had been played or not.

Leonard Compton, his right-hand adversary, gave a little sigh.

"It has remarks about 'duty threepence' on it, Jack," he said, "if that will help you to recall the look of it."

"Don't confuse me by irrelevant information," said he. "Let me think. Yes: it has been played;" and he drew a card from his dummy's hand.

The tenseness of the situation was suddenly broken, and Ida, his partner, gave a ripple of laughter as Leonard played the card that Jack had settled had been already played. Jack gave a great sigh of despair.

"I play with extraordinary correctness until I begin to think," he remarked. "But in thought I lose myself. Awfully sorry, Miss Jervis, and I lose your money, I am afraid, too."

This remarkable piece of play on the part of Jack brought the rubber to an end, and Ida pushed back her chair with a laugh.

"Oh, I so sympathize with you, Mr. Carbery," she said. "Thought is such a confusing process, especially if one complicates it by talking. Dear Aunt Julia, may Bannister give me some money? How much have I lost, Mr. Carbery?"

"Oh, shan't we play again?" said Beatrice. "Yes, Leonard, you did it all too beautifully, but I've already told you so twice."

Leonard Compton tapped on the table for silence. He had a face like a rather good-looking monkey, shrewd, plain for a human being, and almost painfully intelligent.

"The ace did it," he said. "If I hadn't made the remark about 'duty threepence,' even Jack would have guessed I had it in my hand. But it was morally impossible that I could say 'duty threepence' when it was staring me in the

face. That is why I did it, and that particular function of the mind is called finesse."

Jack looked at him in justifiable indignation.

"I have *heard* it called card-sharpping," he remarked with suavity. "But that, perhaps, is too severe a view."

Ida flew to the aid of her partner.

"Oh, Mr. Compton, how mean of you!" she cried. "Yes, shan't we have one more rubber? Mr. Carbery, let's double everything and get our money back. Thirteen shillings? How awful! And my account is overdrawn."

"Ah, then it doesn't matter, Miss Jervis," said Jack.

The rubber was played, and Ida lost. The policy of doubling to get her money back had not been markedly successful. Mrs. Desmond, who had been reading the *Gardener* in an arm-chair, got up also.

"And I hope you have all won," she remarked genially, "or, if that is impossible, that nobody has lost."

"May I have a pound?" asked her niece.

"Oh, Ida, have you lost that?"

Ida gave a little laugh of amusement.

"No, but I want half a crown for the collection to-morrow," she said. "How tiresome of you, Aunt Julia! I thought a pound sounded so likely."

"You should have said a pound and sixpence," remarked Leonard. "That would have gone unchallenged, owing—owing to its spurious air of accuracy."

"Leonard, your English is too beautiful to be in the least probable," remarked Beatrice.

"Yes, but who wants to be probable?" said he. "Probable people are always obvious. Jack, for instance, is far too probable."

Jack squirted some soda-water into a glass.

"Leonard asked me a question the other day desiring information," he said. "I gave him the information he wished—it happened to be quite correct, and he said 'Probably.' That struck me as singularly offensive."

Ida was standing by the fire with her arm round Beatrice's waist.

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Carbery," she said. "Also I quite disagree with Mr. Compton. Probable people are so satisfactory; at least, one's friends should always be probable. I don't like squibs by the fireside."

Beatrice turned a face of reproach on her.

"Ida, your English is almost as beautiful as Leonard's," she said. "And I wish you weren't six inches taller than me."

Ida drew herself up to her full height. Her face was flushed with delicious rose; her violet eyes, black by the artificial light, sparkled with extraordinary animation: she was radiantly beautiful.

"Six only, Bee?" she said. "Surely more. Aunt Julia, how late you sit up in your house! In Scotland everybody used to snore in their chairs by ten o'clock, and stagger heavily to bed at half-past. We all used to sleep a great deal and eat a great deal, and agree that it was most bracing."

Leonard Compton lit a cigarette.

"I hate being braced," he said; "being braced means that one has to take violent exercise to work off one's energy. The really healthy condition is not to want to sleep or eat or be violent."

This doctrine was anathema to Mrs. Desmond.

"Leonard, that is an abominable theory," she said. "Do you teach it to your patients? The only happy and therefore healthy condition is to want to do twice as much as you possibly can. You are describing the existence of a cow."

Leonard turned to Ida.

"I'm sure Miss Jervis agrees with me," he said.

"Yes, I think I do," she said, "but I want to know as much as I can."

Mrs. Desmond bustled towards the door.

"Dear Ida, you know far too much as it is," she said. "You know all sorts of strange and upsetting things. Come, let us go to bed."





SIXTH

THIS pleasant little party, starting as it did from very promising beginnings, grew very quickly in intimacy. Leonard Compton, for instance, was Beatrice's first cousin; aunt and niece, both devoted to the other, were there; and the fifth wheel was the wholesomest young man in England, and already a great favourite with Mrs. Desmond. It was not to be wondered, therefore, especially since Ida and her friend sat up for an hour in Ida's bedroom discussing things in general and their immediate surroundings in particular, for an hour or two that night, while in the smoking-room the two young men were doing precisely the same thing, each party also finding much cause for satisfaction in the immediate outlook, that the next morning found them all on an immensely advanced stage of friendliness. The conversation in the smoking-room contained nothing of particular note, Jack's contribution to criticism as regards Ida and her friend being chiefly of the sort "I think they are both rippers," but the talk between the other two went nearer, as women are wont to do, to the essentials. It began, as was natural, on externals.

Ida had sent her maid away after she had brushed out her hair, and sat before the fire with Beatrice, with that river of gold flowing down below her waist. It was extraordinarily thick and fine, with a texture of floss-silk, and Beatrice was just holding it up in her hands wondering at the weight of it.

"You extremely lucky person!" she was saying. "Oh, you have so much."

"Hair?" asked Ida.

"That goes without saying, and I didn't think you would fish for compliments. Oh, Ida, what an excellent barmaid you would make! You would draw them in."

Ida laughed.

"If I've been fishing for compliments, I've rather caught the other thing," she remarked.

"Not a bit of it. You would draw them in. You see, you happen to be adorable. There's a compliment, and another is coming. You have improved quite enormously."

Ida laughed again.

"You temper your compliments to the shorn—the shorn subject of them," she said. "What was there so wrong about me before?"

"You weren't quite human," said Beatrice. "You were rather too astral for everyday use."

Ida looked up at her quickly.

"Ah, I hope what you say is true," she said. "If sorrow or anxiety are good for one, they are good just for that. Yes, I hope I am a little more human."

Once again the hunted look came into her eyes: Beatrice, however, standing behind her, did not see it.

"Yes, yes," she went on, "one learns, I hope, to allow for everyone having awful and secret sorrows and anxieties that they cannot tell to anyone, and yet, if they are brave, they will manage to turn a smiling face to the world: they will not let sorrow make them bitter, nor anxiety make them suspicious and distrustful of the whole big design. And when their anxieties lessen, when their apprehensions and fears grow more remote, nearer to the vanishing-point, they will come back to the dear little joys of life with a redoubled gaiety. And the little sorrows of life they will bear more patiently."

She seemed to Beatrice to be speaking more to herself than to any listener, and a long pause succeeded. Ida was sitting looking at the fire; at length she roused herself.

"So I am going to put the past behind me," she said, "and be very grateful for the present and very hopeful for the future. Just now the present seems to me enchanting. I have had a charming evening. Oh, Beatrice, how nice people are!"

"Which in particular?"

"Oh, you, if you wish, and Aunt Julia. Also Mr. Compton."

"So you leave poor Jack Carbery out?"

"No; I was trying to say something special about him. It is hard, because there is nothing special about him. How

very, very clean he is! And is that a symbol of his mental cleanliness, just as Aunt Julia says that such an evening as we have been spending, nice silly talk, silly bridge, is the symbol of kindness?"

"Ah, I am glad you like him," said Beatrice. "That is another sign of your improvement. A couple of years ago you would have thought him a nonentity."

Ida considered this.

"I should have been wrong then," she said. "Because it seems to me now that some people put in practice instinctively all that others get to, or try to get to, with a great deal of thought and meditation. If one can do that, it seems to me a very admirable short-cut to make."

This led her friend into a different line.

"Do you still meditate?" she asked.

Ida looked up in some surprise.

"Oh, yes, always," she said, "for an hour a day. What an odd question! You might as well ask me if I still washed my hands."

Beatrice gave a great sigh.

"I tried it once," she said. "I sat down and began to think. I thought of everything under the sun at least three times. I found that it had taken exactly ten minutes."

Ida smiled.

"And I only think of one thing," she said, "and I never finish. But I must get more constant: Abdul meditates two hours a day always. And I am so slack: supposing I am very busy or very tired, I cut it short."

Beatrice was disposed to be frivolous.

"I can't conceive it possible to meditate like that," she said. "I couldn't meditate on a new dress for more than a minute. But I dare say I think rather quicker than Abdul. And is he going to remain with you always?"

"Oh yes, always," said Ida.

She gave a little shiver.

"It is impossible that he should leave me," she added.

The next morning was delightfully bright and sunny, a sort of apology and most handsome reparation for the darkness and drizzle of the day before, a golden November morning, glorious above with white fleeces of washed clouds drifting over the blue—glorious, too, with every tint of rus-

set and orange and brown, the sunset of the leafage of the trees. There had been some slight touch of frost in the last starry hours before morning, and the air was brisk with the unutterably clean smell of the early cold. And though the gray skies and weeping clouds of the day before had been ideal for planting, it appeared this morning that this day of windy brightness was but another instance of perfection, and Mrs. Desmond at breakfast firmly announced that, whatever anybody else might do, her day was completely arranged for.

"Fate has ordained that I shall be a gardener all morning," she said, "and a farmer all afternoon. Pigs arrived yesterday—but pigs, how I adore them! Black Berkshire little piglets with curly tails."

"And their latter end," remarked Leonard. "Eight o'clock on a fine morning, a huge butcher in a blue smock. And you will try to say to yourself, Mrs. Desmond, that it is only the cat. But your voice will ring false. Later on, again, you will forget that, and instead you will think of them at breakfast. Bacon, like this—how delicious!"

Beatrice put down her fork.

"Leonard, how intensely unpleasant you are!" she said. "My interior demands a diet of meat, but my sensibilities demand not to think about it. And I was so hungry."

"My dear, vegetarianism based on principles is an indefensible fad," said Mrs. Desmond. "One lays down a rule that one will not take life, yet one devours thousands of bacteria a day. Also, if one is a vegetarian, one eats vegetables, particularly cauliflowers. Can one give orders to the cook that all slugs found thereon are to be put back into one's herbaceous border? Such nonsense!"

"I was only pleading for pigs," remarked Leonard, eating his bacon placidly. "What do you think about it all, Miss Jervis?"

Ida's foreign life had stopped in her the English habit of breakfast: she had a cup of coffee only and a roll.

"I can't see why anyone makes such a fuss about death," she said. "Surely death is a very incidental affair."

Now, this was the sort of remark of which Mrs. Desmond had a vague horror. It implied "more behind," and her healthy mind shrank from that on the grounds of morbidity, as a healthy body shrinks from the idea of disease.

"Oh, Ida, I have no patience with you," she said. "Death makes so much more material difference than anything which one can imagine. One may have an estrangement with a friend, which it may take years to heal. But death is irremediable—even to my poor little Berkshire pigs. Yet I eat bacon still. And I shall continue to eat it without giving a thought to it. Yes, a slice of cold tongue," she said to a footman.

She attacked her new plate with delightful appetite.

"Days are so full," she said, "that one never has time to think. I am sure on general principles that I am right to see the cook after breakfast, and make sure there will be something to eat at dinner. I am sure I am right to garden; I am sure I am right to see that the Berkshire pigs are comfortably housed. I can't sit down all morning and consider whether I could not be spending it better than in gardening. Ida, I am sure you will disagree with that, dearest?"

Ida opened her eyes very wide.

"Not at all," she said. "I thoroughly approve. I think that is just what one ought to do, to settle once and for all the broad general principles of our lives, and then not bother to consider whether at a given moment one might not be doing something better."

"And what are your broad general principles for to-day, dear?" asked Mrs. Desmond.

"It depends on what anybody else wants me to do," she said. "My broad general principle until tea-time is to be amiable."

"And after tea you are going to break down, and be in a bad temper, dear?" asked Beatrice. "How wise to arrange that sort of thing beforehand!"

"Be very amiable, then, after lunch, Miss Ida," said Jack Carbery, "and come and play a foursome with us. Leonard and I propose to have a single this morning."

Ida got up.

"I don't know whether you will continue to think me amiable if I do," she said. "My golf is supposed to resemble superficial gardening, slight hoeing of the soil."

"Oh, let us do that," said Beatrice. "It doesn't matter how one plays on a nice day: it's the day itself that is sufficient to make one happy. It is only necessary to hit the ball properly if there is an east wind."

The two young men accordingly strolled off to the links soon after breakfast, while the girls took chairs into the garden. For though the day was of November, the sun under shelter of the house made sitting out delightful, though still in the shade a little hoar-frost made ribbons of white on the vivid green of the grass. But it had not been severe enough to blacken the great purple clump of Michaelmas daisies that still stood up bravely in the border, as did the scarlet of the few salvias that lingered there. Delightful, also, was it to watch Aunt Julia toiling with as much effort as, and far more ardour than, the gardeners, and more delightful still when from sheer fatigue she rested from her labours and joined them.

"Ah, how delicious and how healthy it is," she said, as she took off her leather gauntlets, "to work hard with one's hands in the real earth! If I spend the morning reading some book of the highest educational value, I feel as if the day was half wasted. But give me a patch of weeding to do, something hard and definite and practical, of which I can see the result!"

Ida laughed.

"Dear aunt," she said, "you have been trying to make me express disagreement from you all morning, and it is really cruel to disappoint you. But to-day I, too, am going to be definite and practical, and if you come with us round the links you will see again the definite results of my golfing. They take the form of large black mouths cut in the ball, and large pieces of turf dug industriously from the soil, and usually not replaced."

"That will be very interesting," said Beatrice, "because I want to see whether Mr. Carbery can lose his temper. Personally, I don't believe he can, and if he doesn't with Ida, I shall know he can't."

"Inability to lose one's temper strikes me as rather a defect," said Mrs. Desmond. "It implies a want of vitality."

"Ah, there's no want of vitality in Mr. Carbery," said Ida. "I don't think I ever met anyone who had more. Abdul thinks so, too. Now, that is curious——"

"Dearest Ida, why?" asked Mrs. Desmond. "Surely you don't require much occult power, if you only set eyes on Mr. Carbery, to tell that he has got an immense amount of vitality."

"Ah, but Abdul does not mean by vitality big muscles and a red face—not that Mr. Carbery has a red face—he means inward vitality, power."

Mrs. Desmond did not like this: it approached too near to the borderland of occultism. She sighed.

"I have often noticed," she said, "that Southern races are the very worst judges possible of character. Poor Mr. Carbery! if you hinted that he was possessed of occult power, he would have a fit, and certainly a red face, because he would think you were laughing at him."

"Ah, he may have it without knowing it," said Ida. "One doesn't know of the existence of any power till something calls it into play. But I didn't mean occult power, nor did Abdul, but simply force. As Abdul said, 'That is a man to be obeyed.'"

"That is probably quite true," said Mrs. Desmond, relieved to find that occultism dropped below the horizon again. "And now, Ida dear, I want to be practical and definite again. I shall have finished in the garden in a week, and we shall be half-way through November. Shall we go up to London for a month before we come down here for Christmas? I love this place, but my ardour cools a little in December. And there is something rather cheery about London then. There are nice cosy little things to do, and not so many people that one can't see any of them, as is the case in the summer. June in London is rather like the Royal Academy: the immense mass of objects exposed for view shuts out the view of them all."

"The roving London eye," said Beatrice, "how well I know it! In the very act of saying, 'How glad I am to see you!' the owner of the roving eye will have seen a dozen other people to whom she—it is usually a woman—wishes to talk. And as she talks to each her eye will still be roving on, always elsewhere."

"I know: whatever one is doing, one is thinking of what one is going to do next. It is an insane state of mind," said Mrs. Desmond. "Yet how is one to prevent it? I'm sure you can tell me, Ida."

"Well, dear aunt, I should recommend you to concentrate your mind on what you happen to be doing," said Ida gravely. "I really believe you would find that that helped considerably."

"I'm sure it would, but it is no practical use telling one to concentrate one's mind; of course, if I could do that, the question would be solved. But I can't."

Ida got quite grave.

"Of course, it is the hardest thing in the world," she said; "if one can really do that, all the rest follows."

"All the rest? What rest do you mean?"

"Why, Aunt Julia, anything you want to do. If you can concentrate your mind on anything, really concentrate it, I mean, the thing is yours."

There was an Ida here whom Mrs. Desmond hoped had been exorcised by the visits of the last three months, the psychical Ida, so she mentally labelled her, who had always been to her a rather embarrassing personality. Yet the girl looked so normal, and, what is more, so beautiful, that she had not the heart to stop her.

"I don't understand, dear: tell me," she said.

The girl looked at her inquiringly.

"It will not bore you?" she asked. "And you will not laugh at it?"

Mrs. Desmond got up a moment and peered over the terrace, where the gardeners were working. The horticultural mind being then at ease, since both were strenuously employed, she sat down again.

"Dear Ida," she said, "do you not know me well enough to know that I am incapable of being bored while anyone talks to me about anything that interests him? A child confides in me about its dolls—could anything be more fascinating? All shop talked by the shopkeeper in question is absorbing. It is only when the bootmaker talks chiffon that he becomes so tiresome."

This was certainly the soundest sense, and in a way explained the extraordinary popularity and position of Mrs. Desmond in London. Nothing could be more unfair than to call her the vaguest cousin to a lion-hunter, yet the roaring of all sorts of lions was never silent in her house. In any case, this seemed to Beatrice to explain things: it was quite probably the reason why so many utterly different people were alike in this, that they considered Mrs. Desmond the most agreeable person in the parish.

"So that's the secret," she could not help exclaiming.

"Dear Beatrice, I don't know what secret you mean," said

the elder woman. "We want Ida to tell us about concentration."

A sudden burst of shyness incarnadined the girl's face, and for the moment she was silent. For it is always a step that gives pause, that admitting of others into the private workroom of one's soul, where it weaves its secret stuffs, and the woof and warp of its loom make its fabrics, its beliefs, and its convictions.

"I suppose it will sound fantastic to you," she said, "but, you see, I have lived my whole life among these fantasies, and they are more real to me than anything else. Now, concentration—I said just now it was the hardest thing in the world. I might have said more—namely, that it was quite impossible without long and daily practice."

She paused a moment.

"Ah, let me send for Abdul," she said. "He knows so infinitely more about it than I."

This suggestion, again, contained the principle of shop from the shopkeeper, and as such Mrs. Desmond acquiesced with more than willingness. Even things occult gained her tolerance, when the shopkeeper spoke of them.

So Abdul came out, lean, brown, a strange note of the antique and mysterious on this uncomplicated English landscape. He refused to sit in the presence of his mistress, and stood in front of the three. A sentence or two of Arabic passed between him and Ida.

"What is that?" asked Mrs. Desmond. "I want to know it all."

Ida laughed.

"He only asked me if you were ignorant," she said. "And I said, 'Quite.' It was necessary, Aunt Julia: you would have understood nothing unless he began at the beginning."

Then Abdul spoke with the eager voice and lightning gesticulations of his race, and his audience was less to him than the fly that buzzed in the window of the drawing-room behind. Mussulman though he was, and to be classed, if class was wanted, with Jew, Turk, and infidel, yet in what he said there was no word which a Bishop might not have endorsed. He spoke of the Way, that Way which leads by a royal highroad without any groping in by-paths or stumbling in the dark of devious forests to the one great Light. All

the human race, he told them, whether they would or not, knew that the Way was there: yet each might choose whether he turned his face towards the Light or away from it. But of the existence of the Light and of the way which led to it none could doubt.

Now, Mrs. Desmond was a very good, but not in the least a religious woman. Kindliness and sympathy shone in her: of meanness or lying she was incapable; her thoughts were a well unsullied. But all these things belonged to her, so to speak, by birthright. Also she hated cant, and the opening of Abdul's discourse in substance, reminded her vaguely of nasal Puritanism. But it did not remind her of that long. Another word passed between Ida and the other, and after a moment Abdul continued:

"It is only by thinking intensely and with concentration of these things," said he, "that their reality becomes real. We all have to live this eternal life: the shoemaker has to make his shoes, the baker bakes his bread; we can never make into nothing—I say it badly—the material world, the body's needs. But it is vastly more our business not to make into nothing the more real realities, the needs of the spirit. And since, except rarely, one cannot hear or see those who make these realities real to us, as our eyes and ears show us the realities of material things, it is by constant meditation and concentration, by dwelling on these things with a mind and spirit eager and attentive, that we must advance in the Way. For not to advance means to recede: the material things close in round us; they blear our eyes to true sight, and dull our ears to true hearing."

Abdul's voice sank a little, but it vibrated with an intense eagerness.

"A countless company of spirits," he said, "encompasses the Way, those who have gone before us and wait on the Threshold. To some of them it is given to help us, but to obtain their help we must dwell constantly in the reality of their presence. To others, fewer, it is allowed to speak with us, and, as through a veil, to let us behold them. Others, again, may be constantly with us, may be heard by us, but may not, unless we wish them to become earth-bound, appear to us. And to all these we approach, we get their help, by our will, by our concentrated endeavour to make their reality real to us."

Again his voice sank, till it was scarcely audible.

"Other spirits there are, too," he said, "those who have turned their backs on the Way, and on the Light which shines there. These, too, it is possible to approach, for they are as real as the others; we are able to hear them, and also to see them."

But suddenly Ida's face changed: her lips writhed with a nameless pain; her eyes came together looking inwards, and as if there was something close to her, near her face, she bent her neck back, as to avoid it. A nervous shiver passed through every limb, and her hands trembled violently. But the seizure only lasted a moment, and at once she collected herself again. But Abdul had seen and sprang to her, and again a few words, unintelligible to the others, passed between them.

Mrs. Desmond had just caught a glimpse of Ida's face; that look of horror and shrinking had been almost momentary, but she had seen enough to alarm her.

"Dear Ida, what is the matter?" she said. "You looked—you looked terrible. And what are you saying now? Ah, I do not like this business in the very least."

But Ida had quite recovered herself.

"I was telling him we had had enough for the present," she said. "You have my leave to go, Abdul."

Again the Arab made a deep, silent obeisance and passed down the lawn, his foot noiseless on the grass.

"So the first lesson ends," said Ida. "And I am sure you found it horribly fantastic, Aunt Julia."

Mrs. Desmond, whose eyes were still looking uneasily at Ida, got up.

"No, horribly real, some of it," she said. "Ida, you looked dreadful just now: you looked as if you saw some dreadful thing like those your mysterious Arab was describing."

Ida pushed back her hair from her forehead.

"Indeed, it was nothing," she said, "and as for what you suggest, I am sure you, Aunt Julia, would be the first to tell me how utterly impossible it was."

But Mrs. Desmond for the moment had been thoroughly alarmed, and fright of any kind, though the moment itself may be but infinitesimal, is always unsettling. The fright has shaken like an earthquake the fabric of the mind, and

though it has not tottered, it does not know if a second shock may not be coming. And her voice when she spoke was trembling with real earnestness.

"Oh, Ida," she said, "how I wish you would give it all up! You approach it, I know, in the right spirit; it is all spiritual to you, all part of religion. But, dear, is not the Bible, are not the Gospels, enough for us all? Why meddle with things that may be on the borderland that separates right and wrong? Your long shuttings of yourself up into your room, till you come out looking as if you hadn't gone to bed for a week? Can't you be more simple? Just say your prayers, and do the day's work, and at the end ask God to forgive you for all that has been amiss? Surely that is enough for us all."

Beatrice had gone inside when Abdul's discourse came to an end, and the aunt and niece were alone. Ida did not answer at once.

"It is my life," she said at length. "I could no more do without constant concentration and meditation about those—those whom I have loved and not lost, than I could do without food or air."

"But this servant, this Abdul," cried Mrs. Desmond,— "it is he really who strikes me as so uncanny. Think about your father, dear, and all whom you have loved, but why is it necessary to go about always with a man who looks as if he came out of the Pyramids, and makes cold shudders go down the spine of the average Englishwoman?"

Ida raised her eyebrows.

"Don't you know? Have I never told you?" she asked.

"Never: I am bound to say it is my fault. I have always refused to talk about these things with you."

"He is the medium," she said. "I have often and often talked with my father through him. And in many other ways he helps me more than anybody else could."

"I wish you would send him home," said Mrs. Desmond suddenly.

Ida shook her head.

"I could not possibly. Besides, he would not go."

"But what would the man do, then?"

"He would remain as near me as he could," said Ida, "and, if necessary, starve. It was laid on him."

Mrs. Desmond gave a little snort of impatience.

"That is what people say if an exceedingly nice appointment is offered them," she remarked. "Abdul has a remarkably pleasant place: no wonder it is laid on him."

But Ida still looked grave, and distress and trouble came into her eyes. At that Mrs. Desmond sprang up, all her affection and love for the girl roused by a sudden compunction.

"Ah, dear Ida," she said, "you mustn't take any notice of my nonsense. Don't look worried and bothered, dear. Abdul is an admirable servant: he is also devoted to you. And as for those other matters, about which I know nothing and understand nothing, let us agree to leave them alone."

The girl gave a little sigh of relief.

"I am sure that is the best plan," she said.

Mrs. Desmond went back to the beloved roses, but somehow this talk had caused to arise in the sky, that had been so clear, a little cloud, like a man's hand. It was as yet quite low on the horizon, and blotted out not one ray of the very genial sun which habitually shone on her life and outlook generally. Yet, small and remote as it was, it had arisen, and with a prescience, dim certainly, but none the less real, she did not like the look of it. Yet, though now, as she gardened, she turned over in her mind their conversation and the homily of Abdul with suspicious scrupulousness, it was in vain that she tried to fix or identify the cloud, so to speak: she had never seen one like it before. Abdul's homily, indeed, was on the whole, better than she had hoped for; the man might or might not be a Christian, but it was perfectly evident even to Mrs. Desmond's mind, which was hostilely disposed, that a very deep and earnest morality, a very strong sense of right, was, if not the mainspring, at any rate a most important wheel in the mechanism that moved him. She had, as has been mentioned, a sort of instinctive horror of the occult and the unusual, but to-day, as it had been revealed to her, there was small cause for horror.

Then quite suddenly and unexpectedly she found she knew at what moment the little cloud had appeared. It was when, on the mention of evil spirits, that strange look of shrinking and terror had crossed Ida's face. And she knew now how a dreadful interpretation of it had suddenly flashed into her mind. For all the sweetness, the kindliness, the

humanity even, had been struck from the girl's face: for one minutest fraction of a second an idea had occurred to Mrs. Desmond, and unbidden there had flashed across her mind the memory of the face in a picture of that strange French artist Mirabou. The picture was called "La démoniaque." She had only seen it once, and, with a natural impulse of her very sane and healthy mind, she had turned away from it at once: her eyes had not dwelt a second on it, yet something in that momentary glimpse had stuck in her memory, and the look on Ida's face, momentary also, had reminded her of what she had seen.

Yet still her remote uneasiness was to herself as inscrutable as ever. With her whole honest and upright soul she utterly disbelieved in any such possibility as that which had thus, unbidden, been present to her. The whole idea was fantastic, incredible: it had leaped into her mind out of one of those dim thickets of thought into which we can never penetrate, yet out of which, as if by control as external to us as the surprises that dreams give us, images spring. For one millionth part of a second, this, like some unconjectured nightmare, which may hold things more horrible than we have ever thought of waking, had fastened upon her. It was no longer there now: her reasonable and conscious self rejected the possibility of its existence. But it had been there, and to the end of her life the memory of this bright November morning, with its radiant, rejoicing sun, its warm serenity, almost unseasonable, the happiness that was hers, and the vague, remote feeling of the gradual approach of something dreadful, was never completely absent from her mind. For on that morning the seed of horror burst its husk, and showed itself to be alive.

As had been arranged, the four younger members of the party set off soon after lunch for the links, and if cobwebs or dust in dark places lurked in the brains of any of them, as Ida had hinted to her friend the evening before, it would have been strange if those benign influences of sun and wind did not, as by the action of some celestial housemaid, sweep them away and let in the light. Heather (more delightful, perhaps, to the student of graceful growth than to the propeller of india-rubber), short and springy grass, rolling uplands on which still flamed the last brief glory of the autumn tints, were the key-notes of the place, late larks still car-

olled, and the great benign effulgence of the sun gathered the impressions of sight and hearing and sound and motion together, and made of them all a day of high festival. And of the four of them it was Ida who, above all, was conscious of an extraordinary exuberance of happiness. Life to her that afternoon seemed like a clear, translucent pool of water, shot to its lowest depths with sun. True, only a few hours ago, the spasm that had crossed her face was but the faintest reflection of a sudden horror that had seized her spirit, but that had passed as completely as the pain of having a tooth extracted, and now, though she marvelled at it herself, her recollection of it was dim, even as the recollection of physical pain vanishes almost with the pain. From whatever cause, anyhow, that mysterious barometer of the mind had shot up to finer weather than had been hers since a certain day in March, now six months ago, and the shadow that had every day since then been on her, now darker, now less dense, seemed for the moment, at any rate, to have passed.

This serenity and sudden feeling of security may have been responsible for her play, which certainly partook very little of the nature of agricultural operations, such as her partner had been led to expect. Beatrice, however, a bitter opponent, had an unkind theory to advance with regard to it. She herself was playing with notable imbecility, which may temporarily have soured her.

"I have always said golf was a game of pure chance," she said to Leonard, as they searched in very thick heather for a ball Beatrice had cut smartly to cover point, "and our experiences to-day—Ida's, at least—seem to me to prove it. There! she's done it again," she said, as Ida made a perfectly clean straight brassy shot.

Leonard laughed.

"It is certainly pure chance if we find this," he said, "and the odds are strongly in favour of its being unplayable if we do. Let's go on."

"It was your ball, wasn't it?" said Beatrice doubtfully.

"Yes, and who sent it here?"

"I," said Beatrice quite cheerfully. "Come along, Leonard. Was it a Haskell? And new? How dreadful! Where are the others? Oh, there, look, they're miles ahead! How very unsociable of them!"

"They look to me rather sociable," said her cousin.



SEVENTH

IT was a morning early in December; watches and clocks at least indicated that it was nearly mid-day, but to judge by the light, or rather the entire absence of it, it seemed that palpable midnight rather than noonday was at hand. Morning in this town of London could not be said to have dawned at all; night of extraordinary density had continued to reign, and through the windows of Mrs. Desmond's charming house in Berkeley Square no ray, except those of the gas-lamps outside, penetrated. Ida was standing by one of these windows talking to her aunt, who was writing letters.

"Yes, I think a London fog is perfectly heavenly," she was saying. "There is a mystery about it which I find fascinating. It excites me, too. Supposing we should never see the sun again, Aunt Julia: supposing it should spread over the whole earth."

"I should put all my money into gas companies and electric light. Also candles," said Mrs. Desmond, with remarkable common-sense.

"Dear aunt, how commonplace of you! Don't you see how frightfully romantic and mysterious it is? Oh, something is happening. A great copper-coloured patch has appeared in the sky."

Aunt Julia laid down her pen and came to the window.

"Ida, you are truly refreshing," she said. "I have often lately wondered at your immense capacity for pleasure, but even I did not suppose it was so all-embracing as to include a London fog as its subject-matter. I wonder if you will find fogs entrancing when you have seen more of them."

"Well, the first one is quite adorable," said Ida. "Oh, look! did you ever see such an extraordinary sight?"

Indeed, even to Mrs. Desmond, in whom familiarity with London fogs had bred a very considerable dislike, though

not exactly contempt, that which she saw, looking out now at Ida's bidding, and infected perhaps with the girl's wonder, seemed worth looking at. A sudden draught apparently had swept across the sky, and where before the thick black curtain had been opaquely stretched, there came sudden rents and illuminations. Swirls of orange-coloured vapour were momentarily mixed with the black, as if some celestial artist was trying the effects of chance mixing of colours on his sky-palette, and through these gigantic rents there suddenly appeared, like the spars of wrecked vessels, the chimneys of the houses opposite. Then the rents would be patched up again, and the dark chocolate-coloured pall swallowed up the momentary glimpse. But the commotion among the battling vapours grew ever more intense: blackness returned to one quarter, but in another all shades from deepest orange to the pale colourless gray of dawn succeeded one another. Then suddenly a beam of the sun itself smote through them all, and gilded the crooked-timbered plane-trees of the square, and in ten minutes more the fog had gone, and clear winter sunshine brooded placidly over the town.

Ida turned away from the window with a sigh.

"I never saw anything so wonderful," she said. "Yes, it is my first London fog. And now I suppose one must get to one's businesses again. Oh, Aunt Julia, it was a good plan of yours to come up to London. I think London is enchanting. I love nice little cheery everyday things to do, and nice cheery normal people to talk to. There are so many of them, too: their numbers are so delightful. I must go and arrange the flowers in the dining-room. At least, there seems a prospect of people being able to find their way to Berkeley Square."

"Ah, they have sent flowers up from Ryssop this morning?" asked Mrs. Desmond.

"Yes, a delicious hamper of chrysanthemums," said Ida. "I shall have a charming time arranging them. I love the touch of flowers: it is like the touch of a child. But I wish they could speak, like the flowers in 'Through the Looking-glass.' It is so easy to be charming if you never open your mouth."

"Ah, I don't agree at all," said Mrs. Desmond, turning over her engagement-book. "It is their silence I love. One can read so much more into silence than speech."

"You rather agree with Mr. Compton, then," said Ida, still lingering. "He said the other day that nothing which one can say is ever worth saying: that the only things worth saying are just those which are unsayable."

Mrs. Desmond laughed.

"That is so like him," she said, "and so delightfully untrue. He is himself such an excellent instance of the falsity of it. He talks such a great deal, and says such exceedingly suggestive things. He is coming to lunch here to-day?"

"Anyone else?" asked Ida.

"Yes, it appears that most people are coming to lunch. They are all amusing, though; it is rather a menagerie, but I so love all sorts and conditions of men and women. Just ring the bell, dear, as you pass."

Mrs. Desmond was as careful and as thorough-going in the selection and mixing of her social entertainments as she was in the arrangement of her garden beds, and by dint of years of trouble had arrived at an instinctive feeling after perfection in these matters. Daring, though calculated daring, she considered to be a high merit in the mixing both of her flowers and of the guests at her table, and just as she loved to see the brilliant purple of her clematis shout to the scarlet of her ramblers, so she delighted in the violent contrasts presented by the variously-coloured natures of her friends. All fine, strong, pure colours, such was her gospel, would mix with each other: so, too, with few exceptions, all vivid people, however widely their views diverged, could not wholly disagree, for their very vividness made a social harmony. She would, however, acknowledge in her more unguarded moments that she had made a slight error when the Prime Minister at an acute political crisis found himself next the wife of the leader of the Opposition. Even this, however, she would have subsequently qualified, the defence being that this estimable lady was not sufficiently vivid. But the crisis during lunch was: it was impossible to conceive anything vivid.

The delicious chrysanthemums had received at Ida's hands a due recognition of their charms, for the table blazed, and Hugh Arnold, who could always be trusted to set the ball rolling, took his text from them. He was in this particular a very useful person, for he was charged to the muzzle with things to say, never missed fire, and always went off at

once. He was a minor poet, but precious at that, and his precocity rather overflowed into his conversation, which was a mistake, since it rendered it almost completely valueless.

"Chrysanthemums!" he exclaimed, sufficiently loudly to be universally audible. "How exquisite! The flower of gold! That, I suppose, accounts for the fact that these are quite obviously copper, and not gold. What a pity that copper is not our standard coin: a new penny is so much more beautiful than a sovereign. The tint of copper is so much warmer. And beauty is so much more valuable than bullion."

His wife, a charmingly pretty American, was sitting opposite. She had only just lately married him, and almost flirted with him still.

"Well, pray don't pay me my pin-money in new pennies, counting each as a sovereign," she said. "But I'll give you several beautiful new pennies for every dirty old sovereign, Hugh."

Jack Carbery, to his great delight, found himself next Ida.

"Are they from Ryssop?" he asked. "The chrysanthemums, I mean."

"Yes: and I arranged them. Do you know, they rather remind me of that afternoon we played golf. It was a coppery gold afternoon."

Jack laughed.

"It was a half-crown afternoon," he said, "owing to your excellent play."

"Did I play well?" asked Ida. "I had forgotten that. I only remember the afternoon."

"A suicidal policy," said Sir James Denton in a sudden uproarious voice to Mrs. Desmond. He always opened a subject as if he had been contradicted, in an explosive and violent manner. That, however, soon wore off, and he became merely didactic and generally tedious. These most valuable qualities, coupled with wealthy respectability, had led to a portfolio in the Cabinet. "We begin by introducing slavery into South Africa, and in two years from now the slaves, I tell you, will have their foot on our necks. And it is owing to our hideous greed for gold that we have done this—gold, which, as Mr. Arnold so rightly remarks, is so far less beautiful than copper."

A faint scream was heard, and Mrs. Marston, very early Victorian in dress, but very "last-worn" in everything else, raised her voice. If she wanted to say something, which she constantly did, she always screamed a little first: it made the pause she wished for. She was an actress-manager, and managed better than she acted.

"Why do we not all of us," she said, as she adjusted a huge pearl that had got entangled in some priceless Mechlin lace—"why do we not all of us just leave this dreadful question of wealth alone, and pursue our own idea of beauty and the beautiful life? We are so mercenary; we ought to be all so much simpler."

She heard Hugh Arnold clear his throat, which was, as she knew, preparatory to speech. So, as she had not quite finished, she screamed again, indicating this.

"Surely everybody is rich enough," she said. "All of us, I mean. Poached eggs and tea, for instance—that is what I had for dinner last night. And I sat on the hearthrug afterwards. What more can one want?"

She helped herself to some stewed truffles as she spoke, and, forgetting to scream, lost her place.

"A charming doctrine," said Hugh Arnold, "but quite impracticable. If ever—it is rare—I see anything in a shop which I faintly desire to possess, I always find it is the most expensive thing in stock. I wanted the other day to buy a little wedding-present for Mrs. Cornwallis, who, as you know, has the most glorious red hair, and thought a ruby would be suitable. I saw a delicious cabochon ruby, not large at all, in Streeter's, and inquired the price. It was four thousand pounds, but the urbane gentleman who showed it me thought that perhaps three thousand seven hundred might secure it. I happened to have fixed on the best ruby that had ever come into the market."

Mrs. Marston executed her celebrated writhe.

"Please, please, you bought it?" she said. "Mr. Carbery, do support me. Whatever the price was, if it really was right, if it really was preordained for Mrs. Cornwallis, and utterly suited the color of her hair, ought not Mr. Arnold to have bought it, whatever the price was?"

"I suppose the question of paying for it may have complicated his decision," said Jack.

Mrs. Desmond paused in her conversation with Sir James

Denton on the subject of Chinese labour, and threw a remark in.

"Nothing can be more uncomplicated than not paying for what you buy," she said. "But it is a system requiring a good deal of *disinvolture*. You have to be on a glorious scale. No, Sir James, I can't agree with you. If the Empire is to go on at all, we must run it on economical lines. A little waste in a cottage does not particularly matter, but it is when you have a big house that you have to go into details. Now, the British Empire——"

Mrs. Marston recovered her place.

"That is so true," she said—what was true she did not explain. "We have all got to work—all proper people work. Well, if we all work as well as we can, if we do our little best, why should we—the little-besters—not form a guild of those who never pay for anything?"

"The guild is already formed," remarked Leonard Compton; "though it is not officially recognized. The membership, however, is quite full. There is no subscription."

Hugh Arnold—he had married an extremely wealthy woman, and was therefore unbiassed in the matter of cheques—applauded this suggestion.

"I will be put on the waiting-list, then," he said. "That seems to me an ideally beautiful scheme. We work; Mrs. Marston gives us her divine impersonations, Mrs. Desmond gives us her—her delightful lunch, Mr. Compton studies ganglia for us, and we all leave the sordid question of paying for things alone, and just order, just enjoy, what we feel we are in need of. Besides, I always feel that I have a sacred claim on anything I want, provided my conscience really tells me I need it. Personally, my conscience tells me that I am in need of a six-cylinder Napier car."

"Why, if I didn't order it yesterday," said his wife.

There was a laugh at this, and Arnold took some chaf-droid.

"Then I am at peace with myself," he said. "And to be at peace with one's self is the whole duty of man."

Ida had been talking on the merest trivialities to Jack Carbery, but at this she turned to Hugh Arnold, who was on her right.

"That is very true," she said quietly. "But how is one

for certain to get that peace? One signs the truce: but somebody else has to countersign it."

The froth died off at this: Hugh Arnold, who was really very intelligent, saw that she was speaking of deeper things than had at present come on the tapis: a fuller vintage than this light luncheon wine was being offered to his notice.

"I don't see how any countersigning is necessary," he said. "One's self, one's ego, is both one's self and one's enemy. The moment you can say, 'There is harmony; the machine—I—is working smoothly,' no external circumstance can count for anything. One's own conscience is the only guide that one can possibly have. 'To thine own self be true.' What an extraordinary knack Shakespeare had of putting his finger on the spot, like that patent medicine!"

Ida went back to the last remark but one.

"Yet how can one be certain one is being true to one's self?" she said. "What if there is some inherent falsity in one, some deep-set flaw which disturbs everything—some—some dreadful possession? You can only know you are doing your best: but what if all the time you are colour-blind?"

Hugh laughed.

"Ah, you are driving me into corners," he said. "You want me to say that it is the business of the homicidal maniac to commit crimes of violence; that if he is to live in harmony with himself he must do his murder a day."

Mrs. Marston shrieked again.

"Ah, how horrid you are!" she cried. "The very word makes me feel ill. I am very silly and childish, I know, to be so sensitive, but murder is so dreadful. Please, please, let me live my life out. It is my own, and I won't do any harm. Oh, Mr. Arnold, tell me my life is my own. Sometimes, you know, when I am acting, I feel that another force, not me at all, has possession of me, and I have to do as it bids me. That frightens me: it takes one back to dreadful ideas about spirits and witches."

Ida, sitting on the other side of Hugh Arnold, had not heard this, for Mrs. Marston's voice had shrunk to the curdling whisper which she employed to such success in thrilling situations, and she turned to Jack Carbery.

"And I hear you are going out to Egypt at Christmas," she said. "You will go up the Nile, of course."

"I wanted to talk to you about that," said Jack. "I shall only have a bare month there, and I want your advice as to how to spend it."

"Ah, I can't take that responsibility," said she, "for I might tell you to go up the Nile; and when you did so, you might find only what an American once spoke to me of as 'these lonely old temples.'" She added that the very mention of the word "dynasty" made her feel sick. "You see, I don't know sufficiently well what you like."

He laughed.

"Oh, my needs are very simple," he said. "I really want to sit in the sun: you can promise me that, I suppose. And if one could get a little shooting—is that very barbaric of me?" he added.

"I suppose it can't be," said Ida, "because I am sure you are not barbaric. But personally I cannot see how kind people can like killing things. Do you remember that broken-winged thrush which you carried home at Ryssop, and mended its wing? Yet supposing it had been a pheasant without a broken wing, you would have shot it."

"Ah, but the thrush was suffering," said Jack. "Would you have had me leave it?"

"And the pheasant was not, therefore you kill it?" said Ida.

Jack crumbled his bread for a moment or two in silence, his eyes on the table. Then he raised them, clear and honest, to Ida.

"I give it up," he said. "What's the answer? It is like war, is it not? You kill as many men as you can, and treat those that are wounded as if they were your brothers."

Sir James Denton had heard this.

"Quite right, quite right, Mr. Carbery," he said. "War is the most hopeless imbecility in the world, and the ruler or governor who permits it I hold to be a homicidal maniac of the most deadly kind. You were talking just now of Egypt, were you not? We got a most extraordinary piece of news this morning at the Foreign Office connected with that country which we have—ah—stolen."

This was by way of *amende* to Mrs. Desmond, with whom he had been disagreeing violently on South African topics, an olive-branch held out to her. She accepted it at once with her satisfactory laugh.

"I forgive you for South Africa over that, my dear Sir James," she said. "Now, do tell us your news, particularly if you ought not."

A certain hush had fallen on the table, and even Mrs. Marston stopped in mid-scream, a rare phenomenon, for Sir James was quite delightfully indiscreet, and consequently worth listening to when he talked on political matters. He waved his hand.

"Ah, nothing political," he said, and a murmur of disappointment ran round the table, "but I thought it might interest Miss Jervis—and indeed, perhaps," he added noticing the silence, "one or two others of you. Well, about two months ago an Englishman applied for the protection of the Government to travel into certain very little known oases west of Wady-Halfa. The object of his journey was to investigate some psychical and occult secrets of which he believed certain men in these distant Arab tribes had knowledge. Well, psychical phenomena are not at present considered matters of imperial importance, and so we could not extend our shield over him. So, like a brave and sensible man, he went without."

Sir James's oratory was of a certain heavy though rather distinguished order, and he made his effects largely by the well-considered use of pauses. These he interpolated at points where his listeners wanted him to get on and not to pause, and they acted as most efficient whets to the appetite.

"He went without," repeated Sir James. "He is naturally of a very dark complexion, and dressed himself as an Arab from Northern Egypt, saying he was a doctor. Now, small-pox, we knew, was raging in the villages outside Halfa, and after he had gone news came in now and then of a wonderful doctor who cured it. This the authorities at Halfa took to be our friend. And though they could not give him safeguard, they were delighted to know that he was safe."

Ida looked up at this.

"Was his name Mr. Henderson?" she asked.

"That was the name. Do you know him?"

"Yes; I met him in Egypt at Luxor last spring. Do tell us, Sir James, what happened to him."

"I was about to do so," said he, with just a hint of pomposity. "He was absent, so it appears, two or three months. Then one day he reappeared as quietly as he had

set off. He was never a talkative man, I expect—people who do that sort of thing seldom are—and, since he had gone without any sort of Government protection, he was perfectly at liberty to say on his return as little as he pleased. But he seemed well satisfied with the result of his expedition, and he has certainly been where no European has ever set foot before.”

“And what has happened to him since?” asked Ida, who was listening very eagerly.

“He left Halfa after a few days on his way back to England. But he waited at least a week at Luxor.”

“My dear Sir James,” cried Mrs. Desmond, “I had no idea the Foreign Office had such a thorough system of investigation into the movements of independent Englishmen. There is something truly Russian about your story; it sounds as if you had an elaborate detective agency in Egypt, which reported the movements of everybody to the Foreign Office.”

Sir James seemed disposed for a moment to appropriate and absorb this tribute to the power of his department, but thought better of it.

“Ah, Mr. Henderson is not quite an ordinary independent Englishman,” he said. “At least, the population of Egypt do not consider him at all ordinary. Some news of where he had been and of what he had done passed through the bazaars like lightning. You know——”

He paused and lit a cigarette from a fire-mouthed dragon.

“You know Egypt is a very extraordinary country,” he said, “and hardly any Englishman knows anything about it. At the Office, at any rate, we think we know something, because we know that we know nothing, and to know that clears the ground a little; it is the first step towards learning. The simple facts are these: At Assouan, a couple of days before Mr. Henderson got there, it was known that he was coming, and the bazaars were in an uproar, a ferment of expectation. Why there was so much excitement nobody knew. To the native mind he had become a personage far more important than the Khedive or the British Agent, and the whole town—literally the whole town—turned out to meet him. A friend of mine, Mr. Alister, is stationed there, and is in charge of certain works connected with the dam. But in the afternoon when Mr. Henderson was expected, out

of the two thousand men of whom he has charge hardly a dozen turned up to work. It was inconvenient, but he had to swallow it: you cannot dismiss your whole body of workmen. Yet he could find out nothing whatever of why they all preferred to lose their day's wage rather than lose the sight of our wonderful Mr. Henderson."

Mrs. Marston's scream was heard.

"How too deliciously eerie! How deevily mysterious!" she cried. "And what next? I tremble to know what next."

"All down the river it was the same thing," said Sir James. "But perhaps the most incomprehensible thing is that, though Mr. Henderson went straight down as far as Luxor by the quickest possible transit, yet the news of him went quicker. That is one of the mysteries of Egypt—indeed, of the East altogether. News, rumours, travel faster than is to be possibly accounted for."

"That is quite true," said Ida. "I remember that the Mediterranean fleet one winter came unexpectedly to Alexandria. Not an Englishman in the place knew it was coming: it had set out from Malta with sealed orders. But the bazaar knew."

"About Mr. Henderson," continued Sir James rather severely: "I was saying that he stopped a week in Luxor, where he seemed to inspire a sort of terror. He had been there before, I think you said, Miss Jervis. He stopped a couple of days in Cairo, and I am told had a long talk with the authorities there. No doubt if anything of importance passed, the next despatches from Egypt will inform me of it. Then he left for Sicily, and expects to be in England by the end of the year."

He grew rather more departmental; the solemnity of his face approached the sublime.

"He is the sort of man who may be very useful to us," he said. "We may perhaps offer him some small Government post, with the prospect, of course, of a rise. He has certainly got into touch with a very little-known class in Egypt—the country-folk, the fellahin. To understand the people," he said rather gorgeously, "that is the secret of successful colonization. It is the acting in the spirit of democracy that makes the English race loved and successful where other nations are hated and fail."

Ida laughed—she could not help it—and leaned forward across to Sir James.

“And yet in Egypt you do not think that psychical phenomena are of imperial importance?” she asked. “Don’t you see, Sir James, that all the incomprehensible travelling of news in the East, all the excitement about Mr. Henderson, is psychical? Or how else do you propose to account for it?”

Conversation had sprung up again in different quarters on the conclusion of Sir James’s generalizations on the colonial system, and her question was addressed to him alone. But at the same moment Mrs. Desmond rose, and the women left the room, while the men lingered a minute or two more over their cigarettes and coffee.

It was characteristic of Mrs. Desmond’s house that her guests at luncheon were always slow to go away, and subsequently in the drawing-room Jack Carbery found an opportunity to get hold of Ida again.

“Do tell me more about the mysterious Mr. Henderson,” he said.

Ida looked at him with bright eyes and heightened colour.

“Oh, Mr. Carbery, you would think it such nonsense,” she said. “Let me plan out a month’s tour for you in Egypt, or let us discuss the union of kindliness and the killing instinct as co-existent in the same person.”

Jack Carbery had a certain quiet persistence about him that usually got its way.

“Mr. Henderson, then,” he said. “Let us take his case. Is he kind? And does he shoot?”

Ida laughed.

“I’m sure he doesn’t shoot,” she said, “because I remember he told me as much. And I shouldn’t say he was at all kind.”

He looked at her quietly a moment.

“You are immensely interested in him,” he observed.

Ida raised her eyebrows: somehow the remark struck her as slightly impertinent: it had a suggestion of disapproval about it which she resented, for he had no earthly right to hint disapproval at anything she did or thought.

“I am indeed,” she said. “He is a most interesting person.”

Then suddenly she saw a certain hint of disappointment

come into Jack's face: for the first time since she had known him a shadow was there. Why, she did not trouble to ask: her instinct was merely to remove it. And the instinct was rather strong.

"But I don't think I altogether like him," she added.

Jack gave a little sigh of relief, which he fully meant her to hear.

"Ah, that's better," he said.

Just as all that was out of doors in the country was more important than what was within walls, so in town, according to Mrs. Desmond's admirable view of life, interiors were paramount. And certainly this house of hers in Berkeley Square where she lived with her niece was excellently adapted for the convenience of its inmates. On the ground-floor was a big double reception-room and the dining-room; on the floor above was what she called her flat, consisting of bathroom, bedroom, and sitting-room, with a spare bedroom and dressing-room; and on the floor above a suite somewhat similar, appropriated to Ida's exclusive occupation. Here, however, the sitting-room had been cut by some previous occupant into two small rooms, and this arrangement Ida had settled to keep. And since complete independence seemed to her aunt to be the only thoroughly satisfactory basis for comfort among cohabitants, she had naturally let Ida have her way. Yet genial and utterly without smallness as Mrs. Desmond was, the secrecy which Ida had observed with regard to the use to which she put the inner and smaller of these rooms seemed rather curious to her aunt. More than curious, it was never labelled in Mrs. Desmond's mind: her desire that her niece should have all the liberty she wished entirely swamped any of that perfectly natural curiosity as to what she did with it. But there had been a slightly difficult moment when the two moved from Ryssop up to Berkeley Square. Aunt Julia, as her nature, custom, and instinct dictated, had wished Ida to be at home with her without any reservation, and Ida in her survey of her London quarters had been enthusiastic.

"It is exactly all that I should choose, dear Aunt Julia," she had said, "and you shall not see it till it is all arranged."

So for ten days after they had come to London the sound

of moved furniture was thunder above Aunt Julia's head, and Ida was hot and tired, and washed her hands extremely often. It was with some pomp that at the end of this time Mrs. Desmond and Beatrice were conducted to the upper story. The smell of paint—Mrs. Desmond's "do what you want" meant "do what you want"—still lingered in the air.

Ida's bedroom was the first visit of inspection. It was a charming panelled room, and it was all white, except the floor, which was black.

"Only permanganate of potash," said Ida, "and two bear-skins. A couple of prints—you gave me one, Aunt Julia."

Certainly the bedroom was delightful. There was a bedstead of wood painted white. A big toilet-table stood in the window; there were a couple of white wardrobes; a washing-stand and three or four chairs completed the furniture. Two white polar-bear skins lay on the floor; the two prints hung on the walls—otherwise there was nothing in the room.

Both of the inspectors, Mrs. Desmond and Beatrice—the former of whom was a sort of sanitary fanatic with regard to bedrooms—gave unqualified approval, and Ida led the way to the sitting-room. That was a girl's room pure and simple: it was small, but there were comfortable chairs and comfortable corners: a piano set at right angles into the room served as a screen from the door, a window-seat was massed with cushions, a revolving bookcase held a set of the Edinburgh Stevenson, a Tennyson, half a dozen Thackerays, and about the same number of volumes of Dickens. Mrs. Desmond spun this revolving bookcase with a satisfied eye.

"What nice books you have, Ida!" she said. "Nice straightforward, jolly books, which you are ready to begin all over again as soon as you have read them once. Such nonsense, people talking about the hundred best books, as if twenty were not enough for a lifetime! And you have arranged the room too charmingly—one corner, two corners, room for three friends and yourself. And three simultaneous friends are a real surfeit of richness. And your third room, dear, what have you done with that?"

Up till now Ida had exhibited the pride of proprietorship, but on this question the pride was extinguished, though she parted with nothing of the proprietorship.

"I have done nothing with it," she said. "There is a

couch there; there is really nothing else. Of course, you shall see it if you wish."

Mrs. Desmond's quickness of perception instantly recognised the change of voice, and her tact helped her to maintain the cheerful indifference of her own. It seemed to her so clear that she might see it if she wished, that the fact that Ida had stated this showed it was not so clear as she had supposed.

"Ah, you will just keep it as a little private cabinet. How wise, dear!" she said. "I am charmed with this room, though, Ida. You have managed it excellently. I shall be constantly tapping at your door, to know if I may come in and sit with you."

Ida's relief at the abandonment of the topic of the third room was again quite perceptible to Mrs. Desmond.

"Dear Aunt Julia," she said with great cordiality, "I shall be furious if you ever tap at my door. I am so glad you like my little arrangements. And you are a dear! Now you and Bee must have tea with me here this afternoon, as a housewarming."

It was to the third room, however, into which neither Aunt Julia nor Beatrice Montague had ever penetrated, that Ida went this afternoon, when the last lingerer of the luncheon guests—the same being Jack Carbery—had taken his departure. A smile very childlike was in her eyes and on her mouth—a smile whether of anticipation of happiness or of recollection, it was hard to say, for while her eyes were large and alert, her mouth drooped a little as if in reverie of the past. But her face, anyhow, was radiantly happy.

Happy she certainly was, yet that term is capable of a thousand dissimilar ancestors. To a *malade imaginaire* a moment's right digestion will give it; to the more spiritually-minded, "the splendour of a sudden thought" will fill the horizon. But to the ordinary yet thinking human being, a variety of conditions have to contribute. Ida certainly had not got indigestion; she was not, either, conscious of sudden splendour in thought. But this afternoon she had a general harmony; no condition, as far as she knew, required remedy.

It was close on five o'clock when she came upstairs, and she would have to go to dress, on present arrangements,

soon after six, since she and her aunt were going to the theatre, dining beforehand at a quarter to seven, in order not to miss the first act, a thing abhorrent to Mrs. Desmond's practical sense. She had thus a clear hour to herself, secure from interruption, for she left word with her maid that she did not wish to be disturbed till it was dressing-time. On reaching her floor she went first to her bedroom, took off her smart London gown, and put on instead a loose white dressing-gown. Then, standing before her glass, she undid the coils of her glorious hair, and a river of gold like a cataract in flood rolled and tumbled in thick, heavy skeins of floss-like texture below her waist. At that sight for one moment, innocent and only half-conscious admiration of that violet-eyed, golden-haired image in the glass that looked so sweetly at her touched the girl's mind. Yet it was scarcely egotism from which it sprang: though it was at her own beauty she looked, she herself was hardly present to her own mind: all that she saw she no longer really regarded as hers, but another's. All this, this beautiful mirrored reflection, was but a gift she had already made. Then, with her thought still "wistfully indwelling," she passed out of her bedroom, through her sitting-room and into the little room beyond. And there even that thought so frankly impersonal to her was purged, and it existed no longer.


This third room was very simply and plainly furnished: a couch with a wooden frame and a pile of thick square cushions stood by the window, across which was hung a heavy dark-blue curtain, so that all light could be excluded by the drawing of it. A couple of plain rush-bottomed chairs were there, and a small round table, on which stood an electric lamp, heavily shaded. On the far side of the room stood a prie-dieu of plain dark oak; above it on the wall hung a small bookcase, containing not more than a dozen volumes, all bound alike in white vellum. These she knew well; their presence, indeed, was unessential, for her mind reminded her as distinctly as the pages she would turn.

Ida locked the door behind her, and turned on the electric light. The shade of it was of dark blue, and left all the room in dimness except for a small bright circle immediately below it, large enough to read by. Then she opened the

window wide. All round the circle of illumination the dimness of the London evening already approached to night, but she drew the curtain across the window, and kneeling down at her prie-dieu, she remained there for some five minutes. After that she rose, crossed to the couch, and lay down, her hands extended by her, breathing long, slow, deep breaths, filling her whole lungs with each inspiration. Outside the dim roar of London sounded like a steady, remote sea breaking muffled on sand, with a continuous murmur of sound and a sort of rhythm in it which was strangely soothing and deadening to the ears.

The girl lay there with closed eyes, her smile not yet gone from her face, but lingering there as the pale broad lights of sunset linger, after the sun itself has set; it seemed, indeed, a reflection of some far-away brightness that flooded her soul. Between her parted lips her breath came evenly, yet she did not look in the least as if she was sleeping: some vivid vital alertness was on her face, and her intense quietude looked like the quietude of strength and life and energy—a quietude of soul-life, which is never so radiant with vitality as when the body is absolutely at rest. Then the girl's lips moved, the smile on them deepened, and, so to speak, went inwards, and in a low voice she spoke.

"The dawn of the everlasting day," she said very slowly, "and of the full knowledge of the One Spirit which moves the world. Infinite Lord of life, shine on me; make me to know that there is but one all-encompassing power, that everything that might seem to me an exception, an evil, is but the effect of my own blindness. Pour, then, thy light upon my eyes; remove the shadows from me and the doubtings. Let thy cloud of witnesses be close about me, and, though not visible, make it known to me that they watch, that they wait, that my soul, too, even now is one of them, is as close to them as is my body to those who with me live on this earth. Fill me with the knowledge of their presence, of their nearness to me and of their dearness, and even as I fill my whole being with the air I breathe, let this knowledge of my communion with them flood and overflow my soul."



Then to her as she lay there, still smiling, still with shut eyes, the dim hum of the London traffic melted away, and through her closed lids it seemed to her that there dawned and grew a rosy light. And with her soul alert and intent she watched the brightening of this inward day, not forcing nor helping with her imagination that vision of things unseen, but just letting it take its own way. Slowly that incredible rose flamed with more and more radiant softness: then across the field of the vision of her closed eyes there appeared, faintly at first, and then with increasing vividness golden rails dividing her from what lay beyond. And to-day it was given her to draw near to the barrier of partition, and she seemed to herself to float nearer and nearer to it, till, kneeling, she leaned her forehead on the cool gate of death or the gate of life, for the two were one. And close to her, so close that she felt that if she moved her hand it would grasp another hand, yet so real that she needed no evidence of sound or sight or touch to convince her of the spiritual presences that hovered round her, the souls of those who wait on the threshold were in communion with her, and it would have been, so she knew in this supreme moment, a concession, a baseness, a failure of faith, to desire anything that partook of material or tangible evidence: they were with her, soul penetrated to soul, the bar of the body melted mistlike, and nothing stood between her and those with whom she communed. Absorbed, yet fully awake, she lay there; lost in, interpenetrated by, the presences that are of the life everlasting, on whom there shines the light of the eternal day. Never before to anything like this degree had their nearness been so vivid to her; hitherto she had, so to speak, but looked out into the sunlight; this evening she basked in it: she took a further step along the Way.

Then, nearly an hour later, when her maid tapped at the door, it was as if she returned from some infinite distance. Yet through all the journey from where she had been to where her body lay, the presences shone beside her, and it was without any sense of shock that at length she found herself again in the little barely furnished room, with the hum of London like a distant sea coming in through the open window.



EIGHTH

LEONARD COMPTON and Jack Carbery were together in the rather luxurious bachelor quarters occupied by the former near the top of St. James's Street smoking the last smoke before Jack went home. Leonard was standing on the hearth-rug, and appeared to be giving advice.

"There are marked symptoms of funk and absent-mindedness about you to-night, Jack," he said. "Now, I will not waste the sweetness of my very unexpected conversation on the desert of an absent-minded friend. So, what is it? You told me you have paid all your bills up to date. That, by the way, is symptomatic. Therefore I won't ask 'What is it?' but 'Who is she?'"

Jack made an impatient movement in his chair, and threw his leg over the arm of it.

"Oh, rot!" he said. "As if you didn't know."

"My dear fellow, of course I do," he said, "but I thought it was only manners to give you a chance of telling me if you thought of it. So it is taken as said, is it? Have you proposed to her yet?"

"No, of course not. I shouldn't feel as if I were standing on one leg, with all heaven spinning round one way above me, and all hell spinning round the other way below me, if I had," said Jack, with unusually imaginative phrase.

"And you just stuck there in the middle, like Mohammed's coffin," remarked Leonard. "Giddy work, isn't it?"

Jack got up.

"Giddy is not the word," he said. "Leonard, I shall burst just from sheer emptiness."

Leonard considered this remarkable metaphor.

"Yes, you'll do," he said at length; "such a wonderful confusion of terms indicates that intense morbid exaltation of the mind which is a sign——"

"Morbid?" said Jack, with contemptuous emphasis.

"Yes, diseased, not normal—*morbus*, disease, you know. That is a symptom to get rid of. You can only get rid of it one way. Go to Miss Jervis, and say, 'Will you kindly be my wife?'"

Jack gave a hollow groan.

"Oh, how can I?" he said. "A stupid, ugly brute like me going to her and saying that! She would think I was perfectly mad. Leonard, did you ever see such a face? Did you ever think it possible there could be such a girl?"

Leonard lit another cigarette with paralyzing calmness.

"There are plenty of people like her," he said. "My cousin Beatrice, anyhow, is quite as good-looking. But the fact that you don't think so indicates that you are biassed in favour of the other."

Jack took a turn up and down the room. He repeated the word "biassed" once or twice, and stopped opposite the fireplace.

"Did you notice her at lunch to-day?" he said, "how deeply interested she was in what that old boy said of Henderson? Is she—do you think she's in love with him?"

Leonard sighed.

"I have not asked her," he said. "But you will probably find out when you propose to her. If she is in love with him, she will refuse you. If not—ah, she may be in love with somebody else. I forgot that. Girls usually are in love with somebody else, I am told."

Jack looked at him perfectly gravely, with a kindled eye.

"I wish she wasn't so awfully rich, too," he said.

"Wealth is not generally considered a bar to matrimony," said the other; "in fact, it usually helps things on. I have, indeed, known it to be a predisposing cause."

Jack got suddenly red in the face.

"Yes, to mercenary brutes like you," he said. "I remember your telling me once you were looking out for a girl with a bit of money of her own. I think that's the most horrible thing I have ever heard said."

"I rather believe I've found her," said Leonard in the same unruffled voice. "I am also quite certain now that on that occasion I succeeded in doing what is so rudely called 'pulling your leg.' Take some whisky, Jack. You are agitated. There, look how your hand shakes!"

As a matter of fact, the whisky which Jack tried to pour into his glass was half of it spilled on the table—a fact which Leonard noted with extreme interest. In spite of his youth—he was but little over thirty—he was a great authority on nervous diseases, and though old-fashioned doctors of the port-wine and beef-tea school, who still in the main thought of “nerves” as the things which render the extraction of teeth painful, considered him a quack, if not a charlatan, he had a large and extremely fashionable clientèle in London. His popularity and success, indeed, in this line were not far to seek: for while he took the world in general very lightly, he took his patients extremely seriously, and gave each to understand that nervous disorders were the sign of a highly strung and interesting temperament. At the same time, he made it perfectly clear to them that, though they were possessed of so beautiful a temperament, it was highly desirable to get rid of this particular mode of its manifestation. His private opinion on the whole subject was that most people thought they had nervous temperaments, and by dint of continued meditation on the subject induced them. Such were not really interesting, except in so far that it was curious to observe that the action of the mind over the body would cure nervous disease in exactly the same way as it would produce it. Indeed, though a specialist in nervous diseases, his conclusion up to now was that nervous disease was in itself (considered, that is to say, in the same light as chicken-pox or typhoid) extremely rare; that the nerves of most of his patients, even those who suffered very much, were in themselves quite good enough to last them through the ordinary lifetime, and stand quite safely the strain and tension which would probably be required of them. Yet severe nervous disease might easily, so he believed, be spontaneously generated: that a man should think his nerves were all wrong was often, in fact, sufficient cause for the caprices of their subsequent behaviour. But he admitted to himself, though never to others, that there was one very common and very curious form of nervous disease which was practically independent of the sufferer. It was to fall in love. For this reason the case of his friend Jack Carbery seemed to him, though only momentarily, of some small importance. And when Jack, the steadiest-handed of all his acquaintance, who would sit wakeful all

night in a punt on a marsh and shoot duck with hideous accuracy about five o'clock in the morning, could not pour out a tablespoonful of whisky into a large-mouthed glass without spilling half of it on his admirably-polished French table, the case, medically considered, seemed to him to be worth patience on the part of the skilled observer.

But whisky on French polish is corrosive, and before going further into the case he sacrificed a surreptitious pocket-handkerchief to the cause of polish.

"You have lost your head a little, Jack," he said; "for why in just one action in life should you think it terrible, profane, to consider money? Whatever else one does, one considers money, unless, that is to say, one has so much that one never considers it at all. To those altitudes I have, I may confess, though it is really no fault of mine, not yet risen."

Jack had mixed something drinkable, and drank it in gulps.

"Ah, that is just it," he said, fired with a sudden intuition. "We all move on the same planes, but to each of us there is one thing, one only, on a higher plane than anything else. And when one gets there, you may throw into the opposite scale all that you otherwise think highly of in life, and up the scale will go and kick the beam!"

"Yes?" said Leonard.

"You agree, then?"

"Not in the least. I believe that there are many people who value two or three things about equally highly, but nothing really more than any one of them. Do they each of them in turn kick the beam? Or do none of them perform that very violent action?"

Jack calmed down enormously: he even became a shade patronizing.

"My dear chap," he said, "when you have fallen in love you will find that you have at last begun to live. Till then you are a caterpillar, a chrysalis."

"And then?"

"Well, you become a butterfly. I don't say you are of any more use than you were before, but—but you fly. Does that convey anything to you? You don't just eat and sleep, but you fly. And it is not until you fly that you learn that you have hitherto been crawling."

Jack finished his whisky with a final gulp, and gave an immense yawn. Evidently there was to be no further exhibition of symptoms that night. He stretched himself with long, luxuriant straining of his big limbs. He was certainly a remarkably large and solid butterfly.

"How I have jawed!" he remarked. "And have I said things more than usually stupid?"

"You are altogether slightly exaggerated to-night," said the other. "And if I were you, I should go to bed."

"I was just going," said Jack rather indignantly. "What a hospitable fellow you are!"

"Good-night," said Leonard.

Jack left him on this, but Leonard did not at once go to bed. He walked quietly about his room once or twice, and then sat down in his chair again, his ugly, intelligent face looking very keen and sharp, and his eyebrows drawn together into a frown half puzzled, half interested. He was one of those real searchers after truth who know that the further one goes in one's inquiries, it only means that one gets the nearer to the heart of some insoluble mystery, and that the highest possible outcome of human knowledge in any line almost consists in no less than this—that one can state with something like correctness, not the key to the mystery, the answer to the riddle, but the riddle itself, the exact conditions under which the unanswerable exists. The riddle, of course, is many-sided; the geologist sees one aspect of it, the astronomer another, the doctor a third, and to him the riddle presented itself in terms something like this: Can we put any limit to the power of mind over material things?

His profession, of course, brought this question into his mind a hundred times a day, but during the last few hours certain circumstances and observations had cast, as it were, not an added light, but an added shadow, on to it. And chief of those was the account that Sir James Denton had given of the returning progress of Henderson from the oasis west of Wady-Halfa. Compton had for some time devoted himself to the study of occultism and spiritualism in England, but he had found so much nonsense mixed up with it, and so much fraud mixed up with the nonsense, that he had despaired before the task of sifting the evidence, detecting the fraudulent, and not minding the nonsensical,

and had put the whole question on one side, preferring to concern himself with medical and psychological facts which he could himself check and verify. At the same time, even when he turned his back on the séance, he freely acknowledged to himself that there were secrets there which fully deserved the most minute investigation, and would some day, he felt sure, yield a high assay of the gold of knowledge. But the vein lay deep in the earth, an immense amount of rubbish had to be bored through before it was reached, and, to put the matter practically, he had not the time to devote to doing this.

But he was willing to grant the possibility of truth even in the most outrageous phenomena, since it is only by granting the possibility of truth that truth can be arrived at; and of all outrageous phenomena, he held that materialization was the most impudent, and the most constantly associated with fraud. Believer as he was in the immortality of the soul, he could not bring himself to believe that at the bidding of a semi-detached little Cockney from Tooting a soul should quit its resting-place, envelope itself in yards of conveniently portable muslin, and give vent in the pitch darkness of the séance to a few unspeakable banalities with regard to a future state, and words of maundering assurance of the nearness and dearness of the near and dear. He remembered even with a smile one such séance he had been to, in which he, the austere and rising doctor, had sat hand in hand with some really unspeakable people in the pitch dark, singing, "O Birdie, come! O Birdie, come!" Birdie being the control in question. Eventually Birdie came, and told them in a rather squeaky voice to be of good cheer, and the sobs and gasps of the faithful sounded moistly round him in the darkness. Birdie was a faintly-luminous personage, and rather shy, so it seemed to Leonard, of approaching him. Eventually, however, Birdie came near, and Leonard had been quite unable to resist the temptation of seizing him. Lights were turned up, and struggling in his grasp, incoherent with indignation, was found the medium whom the faithful supposed to be in the deepest trance behind the curtain of the cabinet. Even for this regrettable accident he had been offered a very verbose explanation, which might deter him from publishing his own very dry account of it. Something had gone wrong, apparently, with

the dematerializing fluid. It was as if you asked for tea, and found you had been given coffee (in the spiritual world, of course). This, too, he published, and the faithful longed to scratch him.

All this was discouraging: he was not, as far as intention went, investigating second-rate conjuring tricks, but psychical phenomena, and for the time he turned his back in disgust on all things occult. Yet to-day he could not help being impressed with Sir James's account of the return of Henderson: even this bare outline looked very like a far more genuine article than Birdie. Miss Jervis, too, in her story of how the bazaars at Alexandria knew that the fleet was coming before it was known to the English officials, treated this mysterious telegraphy of news as a perfectly commonplace fact. Given that one accepted certain possibilities, which he, Leonard, did not at present accept, the whole thing seemed merely an example the more of a mysterious though existent law of Nature, for all laws were natural, or at any rate corollaries from such. But as regards the return of Henderson from this remote oasis, what current, what soul-wave, had preceded him? What was it that made two thousand men at Assouan leave their work and forfeit their pay? How could they, in fact, know that Henderson was coming, and how, if he came or if he did not come, did it matter to them? Had some extraordinary secret, some lost piece of cabalism, such as was at one time known in the East, been entrusted to him? Or was it merely that he was known to have visited some Mecca of spiritualistic lore, and was thus an object of reverence or curiosity? At present this was insoluble: Henderson, however, would shortly be in England, and if, as Compton somehow suspected, he was of the class to which—well, adventurers belong (though there might be others in this class), there seemed to him no doubt whatever that in this extraordinary wave of curiosity about things occult which at the moment flooded and engulfed London, he would speedily be made a lion. And as lion it was to be hoped that he would roar at the top of his voice.

Then suddenly his thoughts paused, poised and descended again, not on Henderson, but on Miss Jervis. From the first moment he saw her he had been extremely interested in her; in almost every aspect she was a type, perfect and

flawless, of the well-bred, beautiful, and, he added to himself, rather commonplace English girl. Climate and culture and cold baths turned them out by the hundred, and, indeed, it was impossible to have too many of them, only they were all rather alike, and thus, as a class, rather uninteresting. But in one point Miss Jervis seemed enormously removed from her sisters, for he had once, just for a fleeting part of a second, seen terror incarnate sit on her face. The moment had passed at the time unnoticed by others: it was one evening at Ryssop, when, the talk being on occult subjects, some mention had been made of evil control. It had passed like a flash of lightning, none probably had noticed it but he, and immediately afterwards the talk had veered. But it had been there. It was not mere nerves—in fact, he had hardly ever seen a girl whom it was less possible to suspect of being victim to that particular form of torture; it was terror, sheer unreasoning terror, terror of something unseen, and to her, at least, horribly real.

Now, this extremely attractive girl, so he had learned from Beatrice, was an advanced spiritualist; she had passed all her life in touch with things occult; she spent a solid slice of time every day in silent concentration; her servant was this mysterious Arab, himself a medium, and possessed of who knew what curious antique lore preserved through generations of his race. But, like flame to a struck match, there flared into Leonard's mind the conclusion that this moment's terror in Ida's face was in origin something darker and more mysterious than the mere knowledge of psychical secrets: it was more personal: it was a fear into the face of which she looked, and looking trembled.

He had not seen Ida again after his visit to Ryssop until to-day at lunch, a month intervening. And if her moment's terror on that first occasion was as complete and overwhelming as it was unaccountable, hardly less embracing was the huge, serene happiness that to-day had seemed to be part of the very atmosphere she breathed. Her face was like the face of a child who has never known the terror of the dark, whose smile is for ever breaking into a laugh for no cause except that it laughs; her gaiety had, too, for others the same spontaneous, irresistible charm of childhood. It seemed impossible that the terror he had once seen there should have left no trace, for there were years of deep-stain-

ing horror in that one look—unless the cause of the horror had been removed, had been destroyed root and branch, so that not even the burned ashes of its memory remained. How deep-seated that terror had been he learned from the look he had once seen on her face; from that, too, he could conjecture from how vital a cause it must have sprung, something that touched the deep springs of life and death, the things under the earth.

He got up and looked at his watch, surprised to see how long his reverie had been. His engagements for next day were rather numerous, but he determined, if possible, to see Ida again. With this in his mind he went to his bedroom and began to undress, dismissing, for the sake of sleep, this subject that so interested him. Perhaps his long meditation had tired his brain and dulled its perceptions, for he did not at once add to the chain he had begun to make another finished link. But just as he was dropping asleep it came to him, and he half sat up in bed.

"And why was she so absorbedly interested in hearing about Henderson's return?" he said to himself. "And why was it that the chill-like return of gaiety had followed at once upon Sir James's account of some mysterious power which Henderson seemed to have acquired, some power that let him pass unscathed and venerated through hostile tribes, and made his return an event to the villages of the Nile?"

Then, moving crab-like, he patched Jack Carbery's suggestion on to it. But it would not fit: the idea that Ida was in love with Henderson was somehow, though he could not say how, preposterous. No, Jack was not in danger there. And the word "danger" kept ringing in his head, like a muffled bell, till it mingled with his dreams. It swung in spondees. "Dan-ger—dan-ger," it said.

Jack Carbery, in spite of the trembling hand and all the hesitations of the evening before, was not the least in the world a young man given to hesitation or trembling, and the next morning found him well up to the average of courage common to men in his circumstances. He had had, it is true, a wakeful night; his breakfast appeared to him as an unneeded collation; and he was hopelessly incapable of consecutive thought, though preternaturally observant of tiny and trivial details. Thus, he noticed a blue-bottle

singing on the window-pane, a fact remarkable in December, and wondered if it was married, and what it had said to the lady of its affections. That blue-bottle: it assumed an enormous importance. Was it a bachelor, or was it a widow? It really seemed to matter. But it only buzzed in the pane, and would answer no questions of his. Then his tea-urn was prey to a sudden convulsion, letting escape a small puff of steam. This startled him horribly for a moment, but directly afterwards the analogy of volcanoes and earthquakes occurred to him, and this seemed to him a very brilliant piece of illustration, fit for a handbook of science, and likely to impress for ever on the infant mind the nature of subterranean convulsions.

Then the phrase "Tom Tiddler's ground" occurred with amazing vividness to his mind, and for a few minutes all he ate and drank was set to the rhythm of it. He wondered, too—a really original thought—why, if there was both gold and silver lying about, it was worth anyone's while to pick up the silver, unless the proportion of silver pieces was very far in excess of the gold. But in this case the song ought to have said so: the mind, without that, formed a very imperfect picture of what Tom Tiddler's ground was like.

Then, like the passing of a dream, all these inanities vanished, and one image only, *Ida*, filled his soul. Was it possible, was it ever so faintly possible, that he would obtain? He was very humble of spirit, and though it seemed to him at one moment that, of all the beautiful and wonderful things of the world, she and she alone was *Matterhorns* removed from his reach, yet he knew well that he was going to try for nothing less. By the right of his own love for her he claimed her: nothing else nor everything else could ever take her place. In the secret place of his life he had builded a sanctuary for her: it could not be that she would deny herself to the worshipper, that the shrine should for ever be empty of the goddess to whom it was dedicated.

Then, absolutely unbidden, and coming out of the dark and going back into the dark again as some bat by night flits into the circle of illumination cast by a lamp and away again, another image flashed into his mind. The Garden scene in *Faust* was there; *Faust* sprang to *Marguerite's* open window. And out of the darkening garden sounded the laugh of *Mephistopheles*, the eternal mockery of evil.

Ida had arranged to go with him and Beatrice that morning to an exhibition of pictures in Bond Street; he was to call for them both in the house in Berkeley Square, and he had no more time for fruitless or trivial meditation if he was to be there in time. Out of doors pale winter sunshine flooded the streets, primrose-coloured, and exquisite to any eye subtle enough to catch the extraordinary delicacy of London atmosphere. Haze shot with gold and palest blue hung over the distances in the Green Park, and beyond the winter-gray of the grass the houses of Piccadilly looked remote and fairy-like, as if built of soap-bubbles. The whole town was astir, and the romance of London, the mingling of crowds of men and women, each with his own secrets, each with his private life, so infinitesimal in the sum of things, yet so vastly more important to its possessor than seas and continents, struck Jack with a new vividness, a sudden freshness. All was so alive, all pulsated with the eternal energy of God.

Ida and her friend were already waiting for him when he arrived, and they walked together to the exhibition, the work of a French artist called Mirabou, little known in England, but one about whom critics were extravagant in all directions. To some he seemed but a skilled technical dabbler in horrors—like Nero, “an angler in the lake of darkness”; to some his pictures appeared vague and meaningless daubs; but, in the opinion of the few—Hugh Arnold had recommended Ida at lunch yesterday to go and see them—the generations of artists had painted and guessed and imagined and toiled, working out the slow evolution of Art in order that Mirabou might be possible.

“He is an absolutely new phenomenon,” he had said. “He is quite new and is as unlike any other artist as is ‘Tristan and Isolde,’ unlike anything in the kingdom of music. Nobody happened to have thought of anything of the kind before, though you can easily, as I say, see that many other artists have been, so to speak, devoured and assimilated by him. I don’t say you will like him, but there he is. You can no more disregard him than you can disregard a frightful peal of thunder immediately overhead, and it is no use saying it is only the thunder. The thunder drowns your conversation and your tinklings on the piano. So does Mirabou.”

Mrs. Desmond was to have come with them, but this critique of Arnold's as detailed to her by Ida with the view of exciting her curiosity had the effect of altogether quenching it.

"The chances are, dear, that I should not like his pictures at all. And to see things you don't like is very bad for the eye, and produces a sort of ocular indigestion. Do come back to lunch, Mr. Carbery."

So the three set off, leaving Aunt Julia behind, and she stood for some little while looking out of the sunny serenity of her mind on to the serene sunshine out of doors. A tiny little detail, a thing of no consequence, however, for the moment just clouded her. She had some vague memory connected with Mirabou, something rather unpleasant. Surely she knew some picture of his, a picture that had been in her mind not so long ago. . . . Then she remembered.

The pictures themselves seemed to justify any view that might be taken of them: there was every excuse, for instance, for one man finding "*La Mort de la Mort*" a meaningless daub, so vague and pale, so uncertain in outline, and in places so positively false in drawing, was the nude figure stretched on a bed of withered foliage, while in the sky there was gradually dawning the light of an eternal day. Yet the same picture to another might convey suggestions so subtle, so overwhelmingly true and so brilliantly delineated, that, like Hugh Arnold, it might seem that Art had been toiling through generations of workers for just this.

"*La Porte ouverte*," again, showed through an open door the dim interior of a cottage, by the window of which leaned an old woman grotesque in face, awkward in attitude, large-handed, ill-dressed yet extraordinarily tender in treatment, looking out on to a cold gray sky, with a coppery glare of sunset low on the horizon of bleak hills. But in the room, between her and the open door, stood a vague black oblong. A little closer examination showed it was supported on trestles. Outside above the cottage door flowered a glorious rose: cascades of glowing scarlet with long sprays of green bubbled over the dim tone of the white-washed wall, and streamed over the thatch above the low eaves—the door was open from death to life.

Certainly at present to all of the three the verdict re-

mained undecided; these first two pictures were undeniably interesting. Ida and Beatrice were competent to criticise technique and drawing; Jack, on the other hand, was, if nothing else, competent to give an honest opinion of what he saw. Beatrice, it is true, had to say to him before this last picture:

"You see, that is a coffin: the poor old woman is alone now. And the door—that is what you will: it leads, perhaps, to the rose outside, which is quite alive."

But when this was clearly—unnecessarily clearly—indicated to him, he was perhaps the most convinced of the three.

The gallery was very sparsely occupied: a few lost-looking people straggled about consulting catalogues, which is always a sign of feebleness either of observation on the beholder's or of execution on the painter's part; but a group of some density was gathered opposite a picture at the far end of the room. But Ida, really interested, quite refused to go straight to that.

"It would be so wrong," she said. "One may be sure that one will understand it better if one has seen most of the other pictures first. On the other hand, it may be something quite obvious and *banale*. We shall see when we get there. I am going straight round rather slowly, because Mr. Arnold says you can't begin to see any picture till you have looked at it several minutes."

The exhibition was admirably arranged. The pictures did not form, as at the Academy, a sort of mosaic from ceiling to floor, but each was set in a decent interval of neutral-coloured wall. But after the "Porte ouverte," things on the border-line of comedy, to the frivolously-minded, followed. "Naissance," for instance, showed a weird figure of a woman apparently sitting on a glacier over which hung gray mists feebly pierced by a pale sun. A naked child—by the scale a very young baby—was sucking a spear of ice which it had picked up, so the beholder imagined, from the glacier. The mother looked profoundly depressed, and, indeed, with justice. It was hard to imagine anything more forlorn than to be left without visible means of sustenance on a glacier with a young baby.

"Foi" was hardly better. A gentian with one brilliantly blue bud sprang from a barren rock. Round the rock curled

snakes and monsters unimaginable. And Jack hazarded a criticism.

"Why not 'Delirium Tremens?'" he asked.

At that, and at the solemnity of the procession that wished to worship and had not as yet found an authentic idol, giggles seized them. "Salome" was a pure joke: for "Salome" was merely the picture of a leering tetrarch of abhorrent demeanour. No dancer was there: only a bearded man leaned on his elbow and sucked a piece of valerian.

Jack again loosed the bonds of the giggles.

"Surely there is a mistake in the catalogue," he said. "I always thought Salome was a woman. I'm sure she was: she danced before Herod."

Then this irreverent party all laughed. It was hopeless to look at more pictures. Even what they had seen, those that had been impressive while they were still inquirers, became ridiculous in the light of "Salome." On the moment they had joined the scoffing majority: Mirabou was a charlatan of the worst description, one who trusted to a certain gloomy Maeterlink mood on the part of the beholder on which to impress these vague nightmares of incoherent thought. Besides, Salome was a woman; it was perfectly true.

But Ida, after a helpless pause, pulled them together again.

"People are still looking at something at the end of the room," she said, "and I give up my idea of going slowly round: we are too idiotic. Now, in our present mood, it is hopeless for us all to go together. Let us go one by one, while the others wait, and see what the picture is. If we go together, we are perfectly certain to laugh, whatever it is. After that we will go away. Eldest first: that is you, Mr. Carbery; and even if it wasn't you, you would have to pretend it was. So go and look at the picture, and then call us a hansom. Then Beatrice will go, and then I."

This plan was adopted, and while Jack, after a short struggle in which to recover his gravity, went singly to look at the picture, the other two sat on a settee near, and waited for his return. The inspection did not take him long, and he came back to them, frowning. His gravity was now quite unassumed: he did not any longer in the least wish to laugh.

"I wouldn't look at it, if I were you," he said; "it isn't

at all funny: indeed, it is rather dreadful. Let us all go away. I will go and get a hansom."

Beatrice got up.

"Yes, don't let us look at it, Ida," she said. "I hate horrors."

But Ida glanced towards the far end of the room, where the crowd round the picture had grown larger.

"I must have one look, Bee," she said, "but don't come if you don't wish. Go out with Mr. Carbery: I shan't be a moment. After all, if one doesn't like it, one doesn't like it: a picture can't hurt one."

Jack looked at her, as she walked quickly up the gallery, with some little annoyance.

"I rather wish she hadn't gone," he said. "The picture is ghastly. It is called '*La Démoniaque*.' It is the sort of thing that might haunt one, if one was nervously disposed. I am like you, Miss Montague: I don't like horrors either. Besides—oh, well, it's only a picture. Let us go out and get a hansom. I rather wish we hadn't come here."

It took Ida a moment or two to edge her way into the little shifting crowd standing there, and as she waited to get a sight of what the long black frame, of which she could just see the top, contained, she still smiled at the thought of "*Salome*" and the exquisite justice of Jack's observation. Then a parting came in front of her, and she was standing close to the picture.

It represented the full-length picture of a girl leaning forward on a half-ruined column, with hands that clutched it, in full-face towards the spectator. The dress was altogether modern: only the ruined column suggested some antique scene. And though the face was turned directly towards the beholder, yet the eyes did not look at him, for they were both inclined inwards in a horrible squint. Her mouth, beautiful in itself, was distorted with a hideous grinning grimace; something dreadfully evil had changed those soft curves into that leering, satyr-like expression. Behind, a gray leaden sky brooded over bare sand-hills, and to the right of the central figure, painted so that the lines of landscape behind showed through it, was a gray shadowy form, faintly suggested only in dim white lines. One hand was laid on the girl's head, and a face of infinite malice looked down on her. Below was the title "*La Démoniaque*."

For one instant the room, the crowd, all vanished from Ida's sight; only that dreadful face directed straight towards her, yet not looking at her, was visible. For that moment her brain seemed paralyzed: she could only receive just this one impression, an impression of herself, or rather some wraith of herself, buried and risen again, confronting her. Then normal consciousness returned, and she went quickly down the room and out after the others. But at that moment some little black withered spot in her brain had become alive again, and spread like some dreadful stain over her whole being. Yet even as she turned away that deadly sudden vitality was still again: she had the consciousness only of having had some terrible shock, which made her hands to tremble and her knees to feel unsteady beneath her. And she felt that she scarcely knew even a moment afterwards what it had been.

The others were waiting outside when she rejoined them, and she knew she could not have been long, since the hansom which Jack Carbery had just hailed was even then drawing up at the pavement. He seemed relieved to see her so soon, and her perfectly natural manner further reassured him.

"You were quite right, Mr. Carbery," she said. "It was a horrible picture; it quite sickened me, and I must try to forget about it as soon as possible. Let us concentrate our minds on 'Salome.' Dear me, how frightfully I laughed! it hurt me."

Jack felt as if an immense weight—one, too, that he could not understand or account for—had been lifted from his mind. For as he looked at the picture himself, it had struck him that in some awful undefined way that terrible grinning face reminded him of Ida, with her whole nature utterly changed and turned upside down, all her sweetness and goodness expunged and a flood of nameless evil poured into her soul. But the notion was so preposterous to himself that he had not advised her with any seriousness not to see the picture; it was not really ever so faintly possible that a similar idea might occur to her. And now her complete naturalness convinced him of the utter absurdity of that wild notion which had started unbidden into his head. It had been a mere trick, a freak of his brain springing from nothing, and now returned into nothingness.

Mrs. Desmond was ready, and lunch also, when they got back. Beatrice, however, was otherwise engaged and could not wait, and the three others lunched alone. Ida was completely herself, rather more talkative than her wont, and had formed very clear ideas about the exhibition they had been to see.

"There was one very fine picture," she said, "but if one takes all the others into consideration, one is bound to think that it was a fluke. I think you agreed with me, Mr. Carbery, and I know Beatrice did: I mean 'La Porte ouverte.' All the same, Aunt Julia, you were wrong not to come. We had the most hopeless giggles, which is always a good thing. Mirabou's method, I truly believe, is to squirt various colours on to his canvas, mix them up with a palette knife, and then sit down to think what it resembles."

"And if it doesn't resemble anything?" asked Mrs. Desmond.

"Then he calls it 'Naissance,' or 'La Mort de la Mort.' It appears to be really a matter of indifference what it is called."

Mrs. Desmond took a substantial helping of beef: her unpleasant little memory about Mirabou ceased to trouble her: she had "disquieted herself in vain."

"But, after all, pictures almost as much as music are subjective," she said; "the same arrangement of line and colour may suggest fifty different things to fifty different people. Any fine or imaginative work, it always seems to me, reveals to one's self a mood of one's own."

Once again for an infinitesimal moment that dead secret spot in Ida's brain became alive, and grew to a horror of great darkness. The fork that she was holding dropped from her hand. But again it sank back into nothingness: it was but a momentary seizure, a reflection of the shock she had received when standing in front of the picture.

"Ah, I like definiteness, I think, in all art," she said. "Either the painter means something, or else he means nothing. If he means something, I like to have the meaning clearly stated. If he means nothing, why should I cudgel my brains to invent something which he didn't put there?"

"Ah, but a great work of art is often performed in a sort of dream, I think: the artist may mean something, and yet not know what he means."

Ida laughed.

"Then it is very unlikely that the spectator will be able to guess," she said.

Immediately after lunch Ida left her aunt and Jack still at their coffee in the dining-room, finding she had a note or two to write before she went out. Jack had been rather silent and distraught: he seemed to her to be fighting some secret nervousness.

"And you, Mr. Carbery," she said, "do your views coincide with Ida's about Mirabou?"

Then Jack took his courage in his hands.

"Do you know, I hardly thought about Mirabou," he said. "Indeed, it is many days since I have thought about any but one subject."

He stood up, looking extraordinarily pleasant and handsome, his colour high, his eyes very bright.

"You guess, don't you, Mrs. Desmond?" he asked.

Mrs. Desmond, like all nice women who earnestly desire happiness for others, was an ardent match-maker; both the town Mrs. Desmond and the country Mrs. Desmond were that.

"Ah, my dear young man!" she said, holding out her hands to him. "Of course I guess. And I have wanted it so much. It seems to me a very good thing. You have not spoken to her yet?"

Jack shifted from one foot to the other and back again.

"No, I thought it was right that I should speak to you first."

Mrs. Desmond smiled at him and nodded.

"You have my leave to go," she said, "as Ida says to Abdul."

Then the wine of love ran riot in him, and all trace of hesitation and doubt vanished. Humble as he was, he knew that it must be so: life was an impossible thing without her. And next moment the door closed behind him.

Ida was in the drawing-room, and looked up as he entered.

"And Aunt Julia?" she began, then stopped, for she knew that he had not come to speak of Aunt Julia.

He went straight up to her, strong, masterful, loving.

"Ida," he said, "Ida!—I have no words, but I want you

so much. I don't want anything else. There is nothing but you."

She looked long at him, and the smile of welcome she had given him as he entered faded, for something very solemn, love, was with them.

"Yes, Jack," she said.

Then suddenly she rose, and with arms outstretched she came to him.

"Oh, Jack, Jack, love me with all your strength! I want strength so much. No, but wait a moment. Let us suppose just for a minute that you have said nothing yet, for I want to tell you something first."

She waved him away, though she felt that her physical strength was hardly sufficient to enable her to do it.

"Just this," she said. "I am very queer and odd and strange. There may be something terrible about me. It would sound nonsense to you if I told you. But whatever it is, I believe that love is stronger than it, and if you are sure, if you are sure——"

But her strength to resist was greater than his; if hell had lain within her arms he would have taken both. And yet it was with awe and reverence as well as love in his heart that he kissed her.

"Everything is unreal except you, my darling," he said.

So once more that beautiful miracle by which one soul in this great populous world finds the soul for which it was pre-ordained, without which it would be imperfect even to the uttermost of eternity, was accomplished. The ring of belief and sincerity was in his voice, and she knew he spoke truly, and to her at that moment it seemed as if something within her that had tossed on dark and foam-flecked waters like a rudderless ship put into port. It might have to go forth again on billow-tossed adventure, but for this moment anyhow it had found a haven.



NINTH

LEONARD COMPTON was dining the same evening with the Arnolds. He enjoyed an evening there on the whole very much, but at the same time it was a little fatiguing, since both Hugh and his wife were so extraordinarily up-to-date, so absolutely in line with the very latest fact, or theory, or event, that he always felt himself to be slightly obsolete and mediæval. As he had once said, you could, conversationally speaking, dine out for a month on what you had gleaned at the Arnolds; and though this was quite true, the gleaning itself was rather hard work. The latest lion was always there, and at feeding-time, as was right, since the human lion roars not before it is fed, but while it is being fed, the lion roared. Sometimes there were quite a quantity of these noble beasts present: on these occasions the tranquil-minded guest might think of the Zoological Gardens as a place of ease and tranquil repose.

The party to-night was not a large one, for the Arnolds never fell into the mistake of confusing quantity and quality, or swamping the latter in the former, and it must be confessed that Leonard felt a strong sense of satisfaction when he found that there was nobody in the least leonine expected. The explanation was immediately forthcoming: he had felt sure that there must be one.

"Such a disappointment, Mr. Compton," said his hostess as she shook hands; "but the influenza just plays old Harry with one's plans. The Prime Minister was coming and Madame Blafond, and I only found their telegrams when I came in to tea. Impossible to fill their places; but it's too tiresome."

"Madame Blafond?" asked Leonard.

"Yes; haven't you met her? Why, we're all wild about her. She does *the* most uncanny things. Why, I've seen chairs and tables move about when she is in the room, with-

out her ever touching them. And the rappings! I thought she might be induced to tell the Prime Minister's fortune, and then we should all know when the Government would go out, which would be a great convenience. Yes, you sit on my right."

Leonard proceeded to glean.

"When will it go out?" he said. "It seems to me like a man with a fatal disease; but even the most skilful doctors cannot say when the disease will kill him. Meantime, it is rather gloomy watching by the bedside."

"Well, the Chancellor was here this afternoon," said Mrs. Arnold, sinking her voice to a confidential tone, "and he told me he thought he would be able to go yachting in March. Later on one of the Liberal Whips was here, and he said he was afraid he would have to be in England all the spring. Well, two and two make what they always did!"

"Five, I suppose," said Leonard, storing his memory.

"Five, of course, because one has to add on one for contingencies. Well, and what is your news?"

Leonard laughed.

"My dear lady," he said, "the Chancellor has been here this afternoon, and the Liberal Whip came afterwards. You are rather exigeante."

Mrs. Arnold raised her very pretty eyebrows. These were very fine and straight, and gave a great charm of irregularity to her face, for they never moved absolutely together, though they were both very mobile.

"Exigeante?" she said, the American nasality appearing for a moment. She could keep it out of her English, but not out of her French. "Why, what on earth is the use of news three hours old? Even two hours ago is like yesterday's paper. And yesterday's paper is like last winter's snows: we have forgotten all about it."

But Leonard suddenly recollected something; he was so used in the Arnolds' house to receive and not to give, that he quite forgot at times the blessedness of the latter.

"Ah, perhaps you have not heard," he said, "yet it happened directly after lunch, and five hours ago at least."

"Not Sir James Denton's motor smash?" asked Mrs. Arnold. "I saw it. I was at the corner of Dover Street at the time. He cannot be seriously hurt, because he walked to the Bath Club."

Here again Leonard gleaned, for he had not heard of this, but was insincere, because he implied that he had.

"No, not that, of course," he said; "but Miss Jervis's engagement."

Mrs. Arnold looked at him in genuine surprise; quite certainly she had not heard this, though it was so many hours old.

"Well, I never!" she said. "But how interesting, Mr. Compton! Whom is she engaged to, pray? I had not heard."

"To Jack Carbery," said he. "Really, Mrs. Arnold, I am proud this moment. I have told you news you did not know. I don't think that ever happened to me before."

"Well, that's most exciting," said Mrs. Arnold. "Hugh, do you hear? Ida Jervis engaged to Mr. Carbery."

The talk round the table was hushed for a moment: then it was taken up again with renewed vigour, for London generally had much interested itself on the question as to whom Ida would marry, and London, so it appeared, had not thought of Jack. Then there took place a general sorting of conversation: Mrs. Arnold engaged herself on her left, and Leonard found himself in talk with Lady Apsely. She was highly coloured both in mind and body, and had that great social gift of appearing to be immensely interested in any topic that came up, to perfection.

"How *too* exciting!" she said. "And she has millions, has she not? How very nice for her, and of course for him! And retires to rest for an hour every day in a room which nobody has ever seen, but which is quite certainly paved with sapphires. An Arab, too: not she—how silly you are!—but a devoted attendant, who says all sorts of prayers to Ran-jin-pootna. I adore theosophy, prayer-gongs, and letters from the ceiling. They must be nearly as nice as millions."

This was all-embracing. Leonard felt that he had an immense quantity of dishes offered to him, out of which he could select any. He chose the first that came to hand.

"Yes, there is an Arab," he said; "but I don't imagine that either he or she thinks much of theosophy. She goes into far more subtle things. I remember, for instance, once mentioning Christian Science to her, and hazarding a general remark about the undoubted influence of the mind over

the body. But Miss Jervis laughed—the same laugh as we laugh when a child is particularly childish: as if I had said b-i-g, big. ‘And what about the influence of the soul over the mind?’ she said.”

Here Hugh Arnold’s voice was heard for the first time at this end of the table.

“Body, mind, soul, spirit!” he said. “It is far too long a catalogue. You can classify the whole of creation more simply than that. Really, it all goes under two heads. There are things you can understand, and things you can’t understand: there is no need for more. Personally I can understand a leg or an arm—I know, at any rate, what is meant by it, and more or less what it implies. I can also understand twice two, which, as Leonard so rightly says, makes five, more or less, but not four. But I cannot understand the influence of thought over material, nor the materialization of what is really an abstract conception, such as the vital principle (the thing that has once made these legs and arms to move) of a person who no longer lives.”

Mrs. Arnold broke off her conversation with her left-hand neighbour in a jerk. If others gleaned at her table, she often harvested there, and just now the harvest which all London was trying to reap was this harvest of the occult. Though her manners were usually excellent, she turned sharp round in the middle of a sentence to Leonard, who was, at any rate, the best authority immediately available on these subjects.

“What limit do you place on the influence of mind over body?” she asked.

The question was clearly audible all round the table: so also was his reply.

“None whatever,” he said.

Again for a moment a dead hush fell, and Leonard, suddenly rather nervous, went on, finding himself unmistakably in the position of being expected to proceed.

“There is no limit, as far as we know, to what the imagination may not picture,” he said, “for the imagination is as infinite as eternity. It is the one thing which, however far we go, we find still working. And there is no limit on the effect that thought may not have on material things. That, at any rate, I suppose nobody would doubt. Take the simplest instance: worry, an affair purely of the mind, pro-

duces headache and ill-health. Or look at the Christian Scientists: we may laugh, we may scoff, we may justly say there is a great deal of nonsense in what they tell us, but how they have brought home that truth! And they, I assure you, are like children playing on the shore of the sea, who think they know about the sea. But what of the master-mariner? He knows, too, that the children's sand-castles will be invaded, but he knows that they are but playing with the fringe, the edge of the great forces, and with ripples that would not make his ship move."

Mrs. Arnold again was harvesting.

"And the master-mariner?" she asked. "Humanly speaking, who is he?"

The silence still continued round the table, but Leonard felt nervous no longer: he was too deeply interested in his subject.

"They are many," he said; "but I should say Miss Jervis was one of them."

Still a hush continued: Hugh Arnold's voice broke it.

"And their captain," he asked—"the captain of the master-mariners?"

A plate clicked on the serving-table, and Leonard looked up. There were attentive eyes all round him.

"Well—God," said he.

At that the tenseness snapped. There seemed to be a consensus of opinion that these things were not quite dinner-party subjects; they had drifted into matters altogether too serious for a discussion conducted across the silver and flowers, and the conversation split up as the solid mass of cataract-water pouring through the air splits into showers of spray as it falls on the rocks below it. Instead of the one voice speaking through silence, everyone industriously turned to his neighbour, and talked vigorously on the first subject that occurred. Mrs. Arnold turned to her left again. Lady Apsely annexed Leonard, but was unable wholly to leave what they had been talking about.

"Things that are quite incomprehensible are the only things worth trying to understand. And I am told," she said, sinking her voice to a confidential whisper, "that the number of them will soon be immensely increased. We shall all have the opportunity, I mean, of seeing and hearing a great many new things which are wildly mysterious."

"Indeed?" asked Leonard.

"Yes, have you not heard? Mr. Henderson is coming to England next week, after an extraordinary journey in search of psychical secrets. They say his portmanteaux are full of them! What a delightful time he will have unpacking! I wish I was his valet."

"Yes, I heard something about it," said Leonard, "and how news of his coming mysteriously preceded him all down the Nile. Sir James Denton, I remember, told us some strange things about him the other day."

"You know what Madame Blafond said about him," said Lady Apsely, sinking her voice still lower. "How I wish she was here to-night!"

"No: what?"

"She believes him to have got hold of some extremely powerful and ancient Egyptian spirit, a sort of genius, a slave now of Henderson's, like the slave of the lamp!"

Leonard laughed: this savoured somewhat of the spirit of the Tooting séance. It was distinctly "Birdie" in character.

"And on what does she base that idea?" he asked; yet even as he laughed his own meditation of the night before, and the forging of the last link in the chain of his thought, flashed into his mind.

"On the fact that nothing else could have accounted for the extraordinary excitement that prevailed in the villages through which he passed."

"And do you really believe that?" asked Leonard.

"I try to believe everything I can't understand," said Lady Apsely rather characteristically. "There is really nothing else which it is worth one's while to believe. Obvious things are always so dull: it does not matter if one believes them or not."

Then another link suddenly occurred to Leonard.

"Mr. Henderson was out there last winter, was he not?" he said. "Ah yes, of course. He was for some time with Sir Henry Jervis, Miss Ida's father. I fancy he had just joined them up the river somewhere when Sir Henry died."

Mrs. Arnold here broke in.

"And is Mr. Henderson a master-mariner too, Mr. Compton?" she asked.

"I believe he has gone very far in occult studies," said

he. "Lady Apsely, at any rate, guesses that he has gone very far indeed, right away into the regions of the incomprehensible, in fact."

"Well, I guess when the master-mariners get together we shall see some sailing," she remarked.

Jack Carbery this same evening was dining with his fiancée and Mrs. Desmond. Nothing could have been more correct and impeccable from the lover's point of view than that charming lady's behaviour after dinner.

"I am going straight to my sitting-room, Ida," she was saying as she stood by the drawing-room door, "and I shall stay there until you and Jack send for me. Good-bye, you two dears."

And the door closed behind her, leaving behind only the echo of her jolly laugh.

"Oh, Jack, can we?" said Ida; "oughtn't we to call her back? But did you ever see such an old darling?"

"Five minutes," said he. "Just five minutes. She is an old darling."

He was standing on the hearthrug, and the girl came towards him, walking softly and slowly on the thick carpet, but making his heart beat and buffet with every step she took towards him. She was far too sensible and womanly not to know that, whatever a man may say, he loves that the woman he loves be exquisite in dress as well as in person, and that "beauty unadorned" is a mere piece of sentimental cant, and really means nothing whatever. Consequently tonight her beauty was far from being unadorned, and she had been as nearly tiresome in her particularity with her maid, as she dressed for dinner, as it was possible for her to be. But gorgeous she certainly was: indeed, she had been afraid she might have rather overdone things till Aunt Julia, into whose room she went on her way down to dinner, had applauded her.

"Ah, that's sensible of you, Ida," she said. "I was really secretly a little afraid you might come down in brown holland or something unbecoming, just to show what an exalted view you took of love. You are perfectly glorious, my dear."

From the first Ida had absolutely refused to wear mourning for her father: and though Aunt Julia was not in any

way a slave of convention, it had rather distressed her till she saw how vital a point this was to the girl. For the whole system of her belief was based on the fact that there is nothing sad about death, nor, indeed, any "death" about it: to wear mourning, therefore, would be to contradict her belief for the sake of mere convention. And to-night, indeed, she was glorious. Four green—*eau-de-nil*, *vert-doré*, aquamarine, and emerald—shone and shimmered together, throwing up by their shining contrast the pale and perfect gold of her hair and the brilliant, delicate colour of her face, and round her neck she wore a splendid rope of pearls. It was no wonder that Jack's heart rioted in the tumult of his love and desire.

"Ah, Ida, Ida," he said, "can it possibly be true?"

Deep down in the depths of her liquid violet eyes she smiled at him: her very soul smiled there.

"And I was asking myself the same," she said. "And I know it is true. Nothing truer is in the world."

"Nothing so true," he said.

Ida laid her hands on his broad shoulders.

"Ah, there are other things quite true also," she said.

"We must not forget them, Jack."

The smile died out of her eyes.

"Let us sit down and talk for our five minutes," she said.

"I have got something I want to say to you, and the sooner it is said the better. That we should love each other of course matters most, but it is, oh, so important that as far as possible we should understand each other too."

Jack raised her hands to his lips and kissed them: intoxicated with love as he was, he felt somehow that this little act of homage expressed his feeling to her, so deep and so reverential was it, better than any more intimate caress could have done.

"Tell me, dearest," he said, still retaining her hands in his.

"I am afraid you may not like it," said she.

"Ah, as long as it is about you, I shall love it," he said.

Yet Ida found it rather hard to begin. Human love, the passion for another, had never touched her before, and, in spite of herself and her deep loyalty to all the ideas and ideals in which she had been brought up, all the study of occult and spiritual things in which her life had been passed,

this new feeling, so tumultuously sweet, seemed to alter the values of all the rest. Nothing was truer than this, nothing was more real or at this moment so poignant. But at length she spoke.

"There is a side of my life, Jack," she said, "which is intensely true to me and intensely real, and there are many people in the world—Aunt Julia is one, you are another—to whom it means nothing, and who thinks of it, when they think of it at all, with something like shrinking and distrust. You know what I mean."

"Yes, dear, your spiritualistic side," said Jack.

"Yes. Let us come to an understanding about that at once. Now, what do you personally feel about it?"

Jack was perfectly honest: also his very simplicity here dictated the course which the most subtle wisdom would have indicated, and he tried neither to disguise nor mitigate his feelings, nor to evade answering.

"I don't like it," he said simply; "and, as you say, as far as I think about it at all, I distrust it. And yet I can't," he said, "because it is part of you."

Ida leaned forward in deep earnestness.

"Oh, it is much more of me than that," she said. "It is the best of me; all the best springs from that. Sometimes I think it is my life. As I told Aunt Julia, I could no more live without it than I could live without air."

"I am not so stupid as to ask you to give it up," said he.

Ida laughed.

"No, dear, I did not suppose so," she said, "for of course you must know that I couldn't. But can't you come with me into it—share with me in that which is as truly and really me as is my love for you?"

Jack was silent a moment.

"No, Ida," he said at length.

She did not look exactly disappointed, but her face grew a shade graver.

"I supposed you would refuse at first, anyhow," she said, "and I was quite prepared for it. Let us understand each other, then. Since you will not share it, it is only in common fairness that I ask you to leave me absolute and entire liberty with regard to it. You must not interfere in any way with what belongs to this inner life of mine: you must have no part whatever in anything that concerns it. If you

do not wish to enter it, you must stay outside, and the door must be quite shut. I may have dangers and difficulties to go through: they may be very real and very, very terrible to me. Well, I must deal with them, should they occur, in my own way, or rather in Abdul's."

Jack frowned.

"In Abdul's? your servant's?" he said.

"Yes; or, as father used to say, he is my servant, but my master."

Now, Jack was what, for want of a more comprehensive term, we may call English. He had all the typical Englishman's horror of the fantastic and unusual, and it seemed to him very unusual indeed for an English girl to refer to her black servant as her master. Ida read his silence correctly.

"Am I asking you a hard thing, Jack?" she said.

Her wonderful sweetness overpowered him like a drug.

"Yes, dear, you are," he said; "and I love you for it. It is because it is rather hard, my darling, that I love to do it for you. I give you absolute liberty; at least, as far as a man can promise anything, I promise you that. My full, unreserved intention is to do as you ask, and I take your words in the fullest possible sense. I can't say more than that."

Ida laid her hand on his knee.

"That is sufficient for me," she said; "and it is more than sufficient for me that you should say what you have said. And now shall we close the question once and for all? Or is there anything more? Think well, because I want never to refer again to the subject."

Jack thought for a moment.

"No, I have no haggling to do," he said. "I consent unreservedly. I am quite sure what I feel about it."

Her hand still lay in his, and the soft pressure of her fingers confirmed the close of this subject. Her eyes, too, were raised to his; her face was raised also, and at that his flesh and blood cried out for her, for the perfection of her beauty, for the wonderful She whom his nature demanded, and, taking her in his arms as if he would have broken her, he kissed her again and again. And the fire of his love consumed her also, and still sitting there, with her arm round his neck, she said to him sweeter words than he thought could ever be uttered.

"I want you so, Jack," she whispered. "All your strength and all your love must be utterly mine. I want it all, for my whole weight, all that I am, even that part of me which you do not know, may need you to lean on. And if you give it me I shall be safe: no shadow of evil can cross our path. But, like the promise you gave me just now, your gift of yourself to me must be unreserved: I must know always that it is all there ready for me."

Suddenly a doubt, like the ghost of the memory of the picture he had seen that day, glimmered in his mind.

"And you," he said—"you keep nothing back?"

Some faint hint of trouble crossed those eyes that burned so near him.

"Yes, I keep back from you all that of which we have spoken," she said. "That inner life of mine, by your own wish, Jack—for if you willed you might have shared it—is for ever kept separate and apart from you. But I keep apart nothing else, not the paring of a nail."

"It is enough," said he.

Presently, after Aunt Julia was allowed to come into her own drawing-room again, a concession that she appreciated, since she hated solitude, except in the country, as a cat hates water. Her sense of what she called "moral geography" was highly developed, and it seemed to her a chilly thing to sit alone in London, especially when she was so burning and bubbling to see and to share the intense happiness of the others. Alone, however, she was quite prepared to sit until her two despots recalled her; but when recalled she came with alacrity, bustling into the room with an enormous quantity of things to say.

"I have been feeling like 'Alone in London' and 'Jessica's First Prayer,' sitting upstairs all by myself for a quite absurdly long 'five minutes,'" she said. "And have you two dears been revealing your pasts to each other? It is that which has taken you so long, is it? Such a bad way of spending your time, too! If only one could reveal one's future instead, for that matters so very much more. Even if one could reveal one's present, it would be much more helpful than revealing one's past. What really matters is what a person is like now, not what he was like years ago. And what had Jack to tell you, Ida? Did he in broken

accents pour into your horrified ear that he had once eaten cheese with his knife?"

Ida laughed.

"Yes," she said, "and I have told him that it is hard to forgive. But we have done more than that: just as you say, we have been revealing the future to each other. It is exactly that we have done. And I believe it will be most satisfactory."

Mrs. Desmond looked quickly from the one to the other. What she saw satisfied her also, and she went on.

"Now we must make a time-table," she said. "I came up to London with Ida under the distinct understanding that she was going to manage and run the house for me for this month. And you shan't upset my plan, Jack. You have already been very selfish in wanting to take Ida away at all, but until I go down to the country again she must look after certain things for me, and be my engagement-book. I have ceased attempting to remember things since she has been with me, and if I suddenly began again I should get a severe mental strain. Is that understood?"

Jack laughed.

"Yes, dear Mrs. Desmond," he said; "but you will try to recover your lost faculties soon, will you not?"

Ida sat down by her aunt.

"You are very strong, Aunt Julia," she said. "Do you think a strain would really injure you?"

"I don't mean to attempt to find out," said Mrs. Desmond, with dignity.

During the next few days all the plans and arrangements which follow on the heels of an engagement began to spring up in ever-increasing numbers. Ida's attitude towards these things, it must be confessed, was found most unsatisfactory to the minds of her friends. Particularly unsatisfactory was she to Beatrice, to whom the "whole duty of woman"—in other words, the choosing of the trousseau—was entrusted. Here, again, Ida's innate unconventionality and blank indifference as to what other people did, which Mrs. Desmond had hoped was thoroughly conquered by her three months' visiting at country houses, started up again like a weed in a rich soil, and flourished with the most disconcerting luxuriance.

"Surely I've got heaps of clothes," she said. "I don't want any more. I shouldn't, naturally, have bought anything else for months. And as I have made up my mind that the dear aunt shan't provide the trousseau for me, since I am so much better off than she, it is silly that I should have to spend money on myself to buy myself things I don't want. For instance, Bee, you say everything must be new, down to tooth-brushes and sponge-bags. Really, it is too silly!"

But it occurred to her before long that it was even sillier to make anyone unhappy for want of doing the "right thing," however unnecessary in her own private opinion the "right thing" might happen to be, and, like the Government of the day, she voted without further opposition a sum of money to be spent by herself on herself.

Then lawyers came with wills and deeds of settlement. These she dealt with shortly, but with the same unconvictionality that Mrs. Desmond so deplored.

"I leave all I have to my husband," she said. "I think that comprises the whole question of my will."

An obsequious partner in the firm of Messrs. Raven and Maw expressed a difference of opinion.

"It is considered wiser," he said—"in fact, it is always done—to make some—some sort of conditional clause."

He looked up, and for a moment was unable to proceed with Ida's child-like gaze on him. Then a sudden idea struck him.

"Perhaps it would be better if I had your sanction to make all arrangements with Mrs. Desmond," he said.

"Oh dear no; why trouble Mrs. Desmond?" asked Ida, with the transparent childlikeness. "Mr. Carbery's settlement is quite clear and satisfactory."

She turned to some papers, half hiding a yawn, but seeing it was only half hidden, apologized.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Maw," she said, "but are we not wasting time?"

She looked at the clock: it was already after six in the evening. If this stupid and wholly unnecessary discussion continued, her hour of concentration would be curtailed. But she made a successful effort to appear neither bored nor impatient, though she felt both.

"Let me speak," she said, "to show you that I quite

understand. Mr. Carbery is heir something—heir-apparent, is it not? That is to say, if his uncle dies before him he becomes Lord Camelot. Well, the present Lord Camelot is sixty-five and unmarried. If I die before Mr. Carbery, I wish him to be my heir, and his”—she paused a moment—“our children after him. If he dies before I do, my money, of course, continues to be mine. If I have children it will become theirs. But in case of my dying before Mr. Carbery, he is my heir without any reservation.”

Poor Mr. Maw writhed and wriggled in his chair: he was a most uncomfortable man, and sincerely wished he had not done himself the honour of waiting on Miss Jervis in person.

“But, Miss Jervis,” he said, “I understand that you inherit the very considerable property of Mrs. Desmond. Do you wish, without any reservation, to leave a really immense fortune to Mr. Carbery? Supposing, for instance”—he tried to look jocular, and did not succeed—“supposing you had some unfortunate little quarrel with Mr. Carbery? Such things have happened. Supposing, also, the—ahem—quarrel was one for which he was entirely to blame? Supposing—ah, had I not better talk to Mrs. Desmond?”

Ida looked at him for a moment in amazement, then in amusement. She required all those three months of country house to enable her not to laugh.

“Do you know, Mr. Maw,” she said, “that we are really wasting time, and that I have other things to do when this is settled? Let me say it once more, then. On my death all I have or shall inherit becomes my husband’s. In case of his—his predecease, is it not? my property becomes my own again. Does that satisfy you? It quite satisfies me.”

Again poor Mr. Maw writhed.

“Dear lady,” he said, “you order a pair of boots, and the responsibility rests with your bootmaker: if they do not fit, you send them back, and he has, if he wishes to retain your custom, to make them fit. But you can’t send your will back so easily, and you can’t send your settlements back at all. I want you—I would really much rather have talked to Mrs. Desmond about it, but you would not let me—I want you to provide for the eventuality of a total disagreement with your husband. And also you are not even married to him yet.”

At this Ida's gravity broke down completely, and she laughed.

"I will try to satisfy you," she said. "My husband's name is John Carbery; there is no doubt about it. And I refuse altogether to make any arrangement contingent on my possible quarrel with him."

Then her private inward knowledge swelled and burst in a sentence which really almost shocked the lawyer-like mind of Mr. Maw.

"You wish to provide for an impossibility, Mr. Maw," she said. "Kindly draw the deed up: you will be good enough to put it all in the proper language, and I will sign it to-morrow morning if you can have it ready. And now, if you will excuse me, I will go. I have an—an engagement before dinner."

She shook hands with the little smoke-dried lawyer, whose face reminded her rather of a kippered herring, and left the room. Mr. Maw, still dissatisfied, but reluctantly convinced that further remonstrance was useless, collected his papers after she had gone.

Ida went quickly upstairs, tapped at her aunt's room, and in answer to her aunt's reply entered. It had been one of Mrs. Desmond's excellently sensible suggestions that, while they lived in the same house, each of them should be private from the other except with consent. Therefore, though there was no one in the world whose room Ida would have more fearlessly entered, sure of welcome, than her aunt's, she waited for the "Come in."

"Oh, people are so ridiculous, and poor Mr. Maw, who is just like a very cautious little kippered herring, has been frightfully ridiculous," she said. "Yet their ridiculousness is so sweet. It reminds me of my happiness, and so I like it."

She sat down on the arm of Mrs. Desmond's chair.

"Tell me how Mr. Maw has been ridiculous, dear," said she.

"Why, he talks to me as if Jack was a scheming enemy, and I answer him back on the same lines. And all the time I know he is—is Jack, just Jack. But nobody understands that except me."

She paused a moment, then gave a long happy sigh, pushing her hair back.

"They all want to provide against his marrying my money," she said. "Jack—my money," she repeated. "I never knew such a preposterous idea could exist. Why, it is Jack: they none of them seem to understand that."

Against this snow-white innocence Mrs. Desmond felt defenceless. Nor, as she knew, was there any need for defence, and she answered lightly:

"But such a thing has been known in the history of the world, dear," she said, "and we call in lawyers and solicitors to prevent there being further instances of it."

"I never called them in," said Ida. "All this trousseau and settlements are so ridiculous in our case. What does it matter? How can it come in? It is Jack, you see: I can't repeat that too often."

She kissed Mrs. Desmond on the forehead.

"I must go," she said. "I am already rather late. Poor Mr. Maw would insist on arguing with me."

Mrs. Desmond froze up just a little; she could not help it. She had heard Ida tell a servant that she wanted Abdul at half-past six. And it was now nearly a quarter to seven. The most Christian effort could not avoid drawing a conclusion as to what she was late for. And of all Ida's unconventionalities her aunt found this one, this sitting with Abdul in séance, the hardest to preserve her equanimity under. She knew, too, that of all it was the most ineradicable.

Abdul was squatting on the floor outside her room: he had been an hour or more sitting there quite patiently, his hands clasped round his knees, his eyes fixed dreamily on the wall opposite. Patiently, indeed, would not accurately describe the condition of his mind, since impatience was, perhaps, no longer possible to him. But when Ida came up the stairs his eyes brightened, and he got up and made his usual obeisance. She had not as yet told him of her engagement—why, she hardly knew; but she meant to tell him to-night.

"Peace be with you," he said, and the girl returned the greeting. Then—

"I am late, Abdul," she said as he held her sitting-room door open for her to enter. "I am afraid I have kept you waiting."

He smiled at her.

"Will you never believe that waiting is as high a service as any?" he said.

He closed the door softly, and a thought that had several times crossed his mind lately deepened into certainty.

"You have something to tell me," he said, "but I know already. Love has come to you—that Englishman who I told you was strong."

A sudden savage look of pain crossed his face, and Ida stared at him in amazement.

"I am sorry, my mistress," said he. "That shall never cross my face or my mind again. It was the final flicker. Jealousy—yes, mad black jealousy. But it has gone. Perhaps, too, I wondered why you had not told me, and my heart ached a little that you had not. It is good that you are going to marry him. And I think then, though I am not yet sure, that you will not need me any more. My service, perhaps, will then be over."

The girl looked suddenly frightened, and she clasped her hands together quickly.

"Ah, Abdul," she said, "you must never, never leave me till you close my eyes for the last time, as you closed my father's, and say the last greeting."

"I shall never go from you while you need me," said he. "That is quite sure. But—yes, we must talk of these things a moment."

Ida drew in her breath with a sudden wince as of physical pain.

"Is it necessary?" she asked.

Abdul looked at her with infinite pity and tenderness.

"Yes, beloved lady," he said. "We must just speak of it. For to speak of a thing is better than to keep silence, if speech may help. For what said that accursed amulet? That until love is stronger than death, it—the Thing—will never be laid. And we have known, you and I, that my love is stronger than death, and so have thought that it was that which should be near you always and protect you, as we believe it has done. But now another love, also very strong and true, has come to you. It is to that, perhaps, that I am meant to pass on my work."

"But he does not even know the first step of the Way," said Ida, "and he does not wish to know."

"Yet there are many who walk therein without knowing

it, like the children of my race who from their innocence and purity have the open vision in the crystal. Some maintain it all their lives, this unconscious walking in the Way."

The girl got up, still looking very much troubled.

"You must never leave me, Abdul," she said anxiously. "I should get frightened again, and if I get frightened it shows I am faithless, and thus in danger."

Abdul was silent a moment.

"You sent for me this evening, beloved lady," he said, "to sit with you and to speak to the effendi, if it is permitted, of what has happened to you, of the love that has come to you. So let us leave the other question alone. For be sure that while you need me I shall not leave you: I but wanted to say that. Shall we sit now, and inquire?"

Ida crossed the room and opened the door into the smaller room beyond where she spent her silent hours.

"Yes, we will see if he may tell us anything," she said.

Abdul followed her, locking the door behind him, and with a few quick, deft movements got the room ready. He drew the curtain across the window, moved the small table into the middle of the room, put the electric lamp on it, and set two chairs. Ida meantime had fetched the crystal at which he always looked to procure mesmeric sleep, and gave it into his hand. Then she knelt a moment at her praying-table, praying silently to herself, for, since she was a Christian, he could not join her there, and then took the chair he had put for her.

Then Abdul said that Arabic prayer which Sir Henry had heard him say for the first time at the séance at Achmet Pasha's, Ida joining with him. Then he sat back in his chair, arranged the crystal in a fold of his black burnous, so that the reflections and images on it were dim and undistracting, and there was silence, while he looked fixedly at the faint luminousness of the ball.

He sat absolutely still, both hands resting on his knees, his head a little bent forward, his breath coming very long and steady and slow, while Ida watched his face in the shadow of the heavily-shaded electric light. Then after a few minutes his breathing began to quicken and still to quicken, till it was almost like the panting of some hard-pressed hunted thing. His eyes grew wider and brighter, till they burned like live coals in the darkness of the room.

Still quicker and more quickly came the agonized panting of his breath, and great drops of perspiration started out on his face; he seemed to be struggling against some ghostly terror or enemy.

Now, all this was most strange and unusual, and Ida watched him with anxiety, wondering if she had better rouse him. It had happened before now, indeed, that same slight quickening of his breath, some momentary passing excitement had preceded the state of trance, but never had she seen him so wrestling and struggling in the grip of some apparently hostile invisible force. But even while she hesitated whether she should wake him or not, his breathing grew quieter again, his eyes slowly closed, his hands fell off his knees, so that the crystal rolled on the ground, and his head turned over till the chin rested on his shoulder. Then Ida put out a noiseless hand and quenched the lamp.

For some five minutes she sat there in silence again, and in pitch darkness, the window shut and the heavy curtain drawn closely over it, so that no stray chance ray from the town outside could penetrate. Then suddenly she saw that, in spite of the pitch darkness of the room, a faint light, luminous with the milky paleness of some remote phosphorescence, was beginning to glow round Abdul, so that she could see his fallen unconscious head, and the outline of one nerveless hand that was towards her. Simultaneously a little cool soft wind seemed to her to move round the room, and the curtain stirred and sighed, rustling on its rings. In tense, certain expectancy she waited, knowing well what would follow, and almost immediately afterwards a couple of loud taps sounded from close to her.

"Father, have you come?" she said. "Are you here?"

* * * * *

Half an hour later Ida got up and, with a hand that trembled a little, turned on the electric light. This was usually sufficient to wake Abdul from his trance in a moment or two, and it was always better that he should come to himself gradually, not be startled back in any way into life. So she moved quietly about the room, picked up the crystal from the floor, and drew the curtain aside to open the window and let in the fresh air. Then he stirred, opened his eyes slowly, and eventually sat up in his chair.

"I conquered, I conquered," he said; "but the struggle was horrible."

Ida sat down on her couch.

"Yes, what was it, Abdul?" she said. "I nearly stopped you altogether. You were in agony. Should I have done better to have called you back?"

He wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"No, no," he said; "but it came between me and them. It was a stone of stumbling on the Way. But it is gone. It was that jealousy of which I spoke to you. And the effendi came, beloved lady?"

"Yes; I spoke with him a long time. And he said, Abdul, he said to me: 'The evil is not dead yet: it is approaching again: it is coming quickly.'"

She covered her face in her hands a moment, while a shudder, overwhelming and mastering, ran through her limbs: then she sat up, her eyes bright and radiant again.

"But then he said, 'Be not afraid.' And, oh, Abdul, I won't, I won't. I will be trustful: I know it is the truth he has told me. I must not be afraid, because he has told me not to be; and it was no false voice that spoke, but his own voice, the voice I know so well."

She paused a moment.

"We talked a great deal about what has happened to me to-day," she said, "and then I asked him if you would remain with me always. And you were right, for he said that I should not need you after I was married, but that there was work for you to do before that. He could not, he was not allowed to explain more to me. He wanted to, so I understood, but it was not permitted."

Abdul rose and took her hand.

"Be it so then, beloved lady," he said, "and we will march forward, not looking back, and whatever is to be, we will keep the Way, and, as the effendi said, we will not be afraid."

Again Ida had to check a sudden dreadful shudder, but the effort made, she looked up at him smiling.

"Amen to that," she said.



TENTH

A FORTNIGHT later Leonard Compton's prognostications with regard to Henderson and the English public began to endorse his accuracy of foresight with a completeness that Zadkiel might have envied. Even as down the Nile Henderson's coming had been awaited with almost apprehensive excitement and heralded by whispered, unintelligible expectation, so here in England the daily press began to roar incomprehensibly though loudly about him long before he set foot on English soil. And, indeed, if half of what was stated as fact in the press was not unadulterated fiction, he had been on a remarkable journey, setting foot where no European had penetrated before, and seeing some extraordinary things—things which strangely confirmed theories and rumors which were already existent. Geographers, for instance, awaited, with an excitement that these hints only whetted to suspense, his account of the great Zaffiri oasis, lying five hundred miles to the west of Wady-Halfa, where, so said the daily press, he had spent nearly a month. Hitherto the very existence of the oasis had been more than half supposed to be a myth, though certainly a strangely persistent one, for throughout the length and breadth of Egypt there was scarcely a fellah who did not secretly believe in it. Some strange air of mystery, however, hung over the place: it was hard to get a native to talk of it, and even if he would, rolling his eyes mysteriously the while, it was with bated breath that he spoke of the race nearly white who had lived there from time immemorial. Again, at this point the ethnologist was all agog to hear more, for equally persistent was the rumour of the existence of a nearly white tribe, one, too, that was surrounded with a strange atmosphere of awe and terror, that inhabited this remote oasis. Rumour, too, had it that gold was abundant there, and Henderson apparently, in cer-

tain interviews granted before he arrived in England, confirmed this, whereat the Stock Exchange pricked up its ears and company-promoters dreamed dreams and saw visions, which they duly reduced to somewhat unreliable statistics.

Again, the whole exploring and travelling instinct of the English—that Anglo-Saxon passion which perhaps is the most marked characteristic of our race—found food for its delight in those fragmentary accounts of his journey, which were all that was at present available. Tribes hostile to any intruder barred the way in fifty places, and the English Government, it was known, had at one time contemplated a mission of exploration there, but without a very large body of men it would have been sheer madness to attempt to force a passage, while the difficulty of obtaining water and commissariat had at present been considered insuperable. Yet an Englishman dressed as an Arab doctor merely, with two servants only, had accomplished the journey, which the Government had been itself unable to make, or to protect when he made it; and, so said one paper (basing its facts on a personal interview with Henderson at Taormina, whither it had been sufficiently enterprising to send out a representative to get the very earliest news), two stages out of Wady-Halfa, he had discarded Arab dress, finding it unnecessary, and had appeared as one of the hated Feringhi. But geographers, ethnologists, company-promoters, and the public at large, all shied at the explorer's explanation of the absolute ease with which he had passed on his journey.

"I had a secret," Henderson was represented as saying, "a master-word, which I will excuse myself from telling you, but which, anyhow, was an open sesame. Oh yes, very fantastic, if you like, and as ridiculous as you please. But it seemed to answer: I got on, in any case. There ought to be a psychical department in the Government. I told them so before. If there had been, they might have done it all themselves."

But however revolting to common-sense his explanation was, there seemed to be no doubt whatever that he had been where he said he had been. At any rate, to the furthest limits of known exploration his diaries and the maps he had drawn, his notes about different tribes, his natural history observations, were all pedantically correct, and beyond that either hopelessly fantastic or uncompromisingly convincing.

For the mere material evidence he brought back with him was sufficient to stagger the unbelief of Satan. He had photographs in abundance of the strange white race, he had lumps of rock in which he showed the visible gold: he had two or three gold ornaments given him by certain chiefs of the tribe of strange and exquisite workmanship, resembling very closely the finest productions of the fourth dynasty; he had specimens of their earthenware; he had bits of writing in a tongue akin to that of the pre-Egyptian Libyan tribes, who had been driven westward out of Egypt, leaving, however, certain remains on the west bank of the Nile. At this antiquarians sprang to their feet: the photographs of the pottery which had been taken by the representatives of the enterprising paper were pronounced by experts to be of undubitably Libyan type, and the few fragments of writing added four or five characters more to the known Libyan alphabet; while on the other hand the gold-work seemed to show that commerce had existed between the inhabitants of this oasis and the later conquerors of Egypt.

All these things were open for all the world to read, and the drama of his journey, however fragmentary, appealed enormously to the popular imagination. Henderson, still lingering in the south, was besieged by requests to lecture for learned societies, and by the most tempting offers to appear serially in the more prominent magazines. But to these at present he returned but ambiguous replies: he courteously refused to entertain any business proposals till he arrived in England. He was busy at present over the arrangement and classification of his collections: when he knew more about them himself, it would be time enough to think of lecturing.

Now, Ida, with the rest of London, had read the accounts of this wonderful journey, and though from her long sojourns in Egypt she might have been expected to take great interest in the geographical, ethnological, or antiquarian aspects of it, that one little point at which the various learned gentlemen snorted was to her of so engrossing an interest that all questions of race and place became like a mere fragment of last week's paper compared to it. He had a spell, a master-word, something, anyhow, that had made his journey easy, when to others—even to the English Government itself,

which can usually get where it wants—the same road had been impossible. What was it? A master-word, a spell, something to conjure by?

It was about a week after the excitement had begun to rise to really frothy ferment that Henderson arrived himself one Monday night, as duly recorded in the late news of extra-special editions. Mrs. Desmond had originally intended to leave London next day for a fortnight of Christmas at Rys-sop, but Ida had persuaded her into allowing a note to be sent to the explorer at the Carlton asking him to dine either on the Tuesday or Wednesday. Aunt Julia herself was perfectly willing to wait longer than this if there was a chance of seeing him, for she, like everyone else, was immensely interested, since she was at present in London, and people, not gardens, were her concern; but she had warned Ida of the futility of hoping to secure him. The note, however, went off by hand on Monday evening, and half an hour later the answer arrived by the same hand. The note of invitation had been written by Ida.

"DEAR MISS JERVIS,

"I shall be most delighted to accept Mrs. Desmond's very kind invitation for to-morrow evening. It is too good of her to ask me. I have several things to say to you which will, I am sure, interest you. Some of them, however, are of rather a private nature. In the chance, then, of your caring to hear them, I will venture to call at 11.30 to-morrow morning. Of course, if you wish, you will say that you are not in. I shall quite understand.

"In any case, I look forward very much to seeing you again.

"Most sincerely yours,

"JAMES HENDERSON."

Ida's face flushed suddenly as she read this, and she winced as if something had hurt her. Then she crumpled the note up and threw it into the very centre and core of the fire that burned busily, talking to itself, in the grate.

"Ah, Aunt Julia," she said, "I was right and you were wrong. I am so glad, because you are almost always right. He will come to-morrow night."

"And you have thrown away the note?" asked Mrs. Des-

mond. "Ida, you are sufficient to break the heart of an autograph collector."

Ida laughed.

"I will get you another," she said. "I will get him to write something more interesting than an amiable 'Yes.' Now, what will you do? Will you ask people to meet him?"

Mrs. Desmond got up.

"Really I am rather nervous," she said. "Explorers are so very unexpected, and they may want strange food. Does he behave strangely at all?"

"Not in the least. He is perfectly tame and well-bred: you would think he had never been on the Surrey side of the Thames, far less the sunny side of the Nile. Oh, by the way, Jack was to come down to-morrow night to Ryssop. We must put him off till Wednesday."

"Ask him to dinner, then," said Mrs. Desmond, without a pause.

Ida considered this a moment. Somehow she had an idea that he and Henderson would not get on in a *partie carrée*. Yet in the evening everything would be aboveboard: she would have had her private talk, for she had already made up her mind to see him in the morning.

"By all means," she said; "but had you not better ask two or three other people? He is such a big lion—Mr. Henderson, I mean—that it really would be selfish to put him in so private a cage, and not get anybody to hear him roar."

"My dear, you can't get people at twelve hours' notice. Besides, everyone is leaving town for Christmas."

Ida laughed.

"We've got the lion, anyhow," she said. "I expect the jackals will come too. Ah, that sounds rather nasty. It was not meant, but you told me the other day not to mix metaphors."

The two were alone, and Mrs. Desmond retired again into the treatise on chemical stimulants for plants, which was so absorbing, for the literature of the garden was still an occupation in town.

"Pray manage it all, dear," she said. "I leave it entirely to you. But be sure to ask Sir James Denton, who refused him the protection of the Government. Dear Sir James! I still owe him one over South Africa!"

It must be supposed, therefore, that half a dozen notes

represented the management required; these Ida wrote as her aunt read her horticultural journal, and having finished them rang the bell.

"All to wait for answers," she said.

This roused Mrs. Desmond, who was as kind to her servants as she was to her flowers, and read curious little books about the right relation of the mistress to her domestics with almost as much zest as she read about chemical manures.

"So late, Ida," she said.

But a sort of quiet and determined mutiny dominated the girl's voice.

"Oh, I will wait up till the answers come," she said. "I shall sit up as late as anybody. And I will put out the lights."

Mrs. Desmond felt as if the atmosphere had become suddenly electric, and she dealt with imminent moral disturbances with great common-sense, even as in a thunderstorm she distracted the nervous mind from considerations of lightning to the normal interests of life. In fact, whether the tension was moral or electric, she directed all thoughts to anything that both soothed and absorbed. She did so here, shutting her book with decision, though with inward reluctance.

"Halma!" she exclaimed. "Dear Ida, do bring me the halma-board. Simple burglary was what you committed last night. I will not permit it again, and I shall use all your ladders, and be a burglar myself."

And in the pursuit of these puerilities the sudden disturbance in the moral atmosphere was calmed down.

Ida's instantaneous decision to give Henderson his private interview was one of those choices in life that sometimes seem to be thrust upon us altogether independently of our own wish or will. It seemed to her, indeed, that she had no choice in the matter; she was blown like thistledown in this particular direction, just because the wind set that way. She had to see him, and she did not even pause to consider whether this compulsion was dictated by her own intense desire to know more of that black speck—it hardly seemed bigger than that—which had once drifted across the pure white of her life, leaving there a smear that was still not

effaced, or whether some exterior force, the will of another—of him, perhaps—forced it on her. Yet, in spite of the fact that she could no more resist the necessity that made her see him again than she could resist the pulling-in of herself, so to speak, by the revolving wheels of some engine in which her hand or even an outlying fringe of her clothing only had been caught, she felt as if other influences were exerting their utmost force, though ineffectually, to pull her back. The will of Abdul, she knew, was among these: and though Ida did not intend to tell him that she was going to see Henderson again, she felt sure that his will was against her action, exerting its utmost force to drag her away; she felt sure also that it was powerless at present against the stronger compulsion that made it necessary that she should see him. Henderson had told her that he had things of interest to say to her: that was all, but enough. She knew what that meant, and one of two things was in store for her: either by the merciful goodness of God that black speck was to vanish for ever from her life, smitten like night-mist by the sun, or there was a struggle, a horror, in front of her, something ghastly and undetermined, like the vague shape and clamour of a nightmare. And as she thought of this she remembered the communication that had been made to her by her father in the séance with Abdul—"Evil is approaching."

Mrs. Desmond had several shopping errands, chiefly of a chemical manure nature (the result of her reading), to be done next morning, and as the day was one of crystal winter brilliance, she proposed to Ida to come out with her. But the girl had some natural and legitimate excuse ready, though the real one almost rose in her throat, and before eleven she was left to herself in the house, waiting for her visitor's arrival. She had arranged to see him downstairs, risking her aunt's unexpected return rather than the chance of Abdul meeting him on the stairs on the way up to the third story, but at present she was in her own room, finishing the few letters which had been her perfectly valid excuse for not going out with Mrs. Desmond. Among them was a note or two which she wanted taken by hand, and having written them she rang the bell.

Abdul presented himself instantly, and Ida started a little and changed colour when she saw him, for she had expected,

not him, but a footman. But she recovered herself without pause.

"Would you see that these are sent at once, Abdul?" she said.

She looked at him curiously a moment.

"What is the matter?" she said at length, wondering if by some strange clairvoyance he had guessed who was soon to come in.

Abdul's eyes were fixed on her in a sort of agony of terror and pity: he looked frightened, tired.

"They shall go," he said.

"But what is the matter?" asked Ida again, feeling guilty.

Abdul shook his head, and gesticulated negatively with his hand.

"Ah, do you remember that evening of Sirocco in the Luxor garden," he said, "and how you were causelessly afraid of the wind? Perhaps it is so with me now. Perhaps I am causelessly afraid of nothing. Yet I am not given to be causelessly afraid. But evil is approaching. He said it—he said it."

The girl got up.

"Ah, that is not all," she said. "Be not afraid! Have you forgotten that?"

Then he straightened up his bent, tired-looking figure, but with an effort, like a weary man beaten on by a strong wind.

"I will not forget, beloved lady," he said.

Presently after Ida went downstairs to await her visitor. Any nervousness that had been with her earlier in the morning had vanished entirely, and eager, hopeful desire to know, overwhelming all else, took its place. Here in this ordinary London drawing-room, looking out into the familiar hansom-paced square, with its plane-trees, its garden, its utter commonplaceness and remoteness from anything occult or mysterious, where folk passed to and fro on their harmless superficial errands, here in this room she was awaiting the man who held and would communicate to her that which was as momentous to her as life and death—more momentous, indeed, for the life or death of the body was nothing in the scales compared to the news she was awaiting. It was indeed life or death who should presently be announced: he would be shown in like any other visitor, and would, no

doubt, remark on the beauty of the morning, and she would answer saying that it had been fine also yesterday, or wet.

The jingling of cabs outside passed and repassed the door, and an occasional motor throbbed by. Then one hansom stopped at the door, for the jingling did not die away again, but was cut off when it was loudest. A minute later the door opened and the butler said her visitor's name. Then the door shut again, and Ida rose. But no words of commonplace greeting passed. She advanced to meet him, and they approached each other in the centre of the room. She did not even hold out her hand. Then Henderson spoke.

"It is all right, Miss Jervis," he said.

Ida gave one sigh, almost a sob, of relief that welled upwards from the very core and centre of her being, and Henderson turned away to put down his hat, which he had brought into the room with him: a certain delicacy of feeling told him that there was something private, something on which other eyes should not look before him. For Ida's soul, he felt, stood naked in front of him, pure and white, and it was not fit for him to look on it.

But she recovered herself very quickly, and then the commonplace greetings began, she leading the way.

"It was very good of you to come, Mr. Henderson," she said. "You got back to London only last night, so the papers said. I was very audacious to write to you at all."

Not till then had she been really conscious of his presence: it had been almost an impersonal messenger, it was just the mouthpiece of life or death, who had been there before, a thing incorporeal, just a telegram, a piece of news. But now it was the man she looked at, and certainly the sight was a very striking one. He was very dark from these months abroad, but about his face there was something wonderfully alert and commanding. His thin, hawk-like face was, if anything, a little thinner than she remembered it, nor did she remember how very powerful it was. He looked younger, too; there was surely a vigour and youthfulness about him that had not been there before. His travels had not aged, but rejuvenated him.

"Yes, last night only," he said, "and, do you know, if you had not asked me to come, I think I should have suggested it myself. I wanted"—and his black eyes looked very kindly, very directly at her—"I wanted at the very earliest

possible moment to give you the news, the news that I have just given you."

She held out her hand: this was the first ordinary sign of greeting that had passed between them.

"It is very kind of you," she said. "Now, can you tell me more? Of course I want to know all you can tell me."

"Yes, up to the point where I lose myself, too," he said, "I will tell you everything."

He sat down, with a laugh.

"But you will find that point comes very soon," he said. "Also you may be disappointed, for I can explain nothing—absolutely nothing."

"Just tell me, then," said she.

"Well, we don't want an introduction," said he gravely. "We both know what we want to talk about. It is this: I went back to the temple of Mut night after night. Night after night I raised the same presence, and found that by means of hieroglyphics I could communicate with it, writing them in the sand. Gradually I learned the terms, so to speak, that we were on. Now tell me: have you, since March last, been conscious of any abnormality, or does your life, your inward life, go on quite smoothly?"

Ida did not reply immediately.

"I believe it goes on smoothly," she said. "I believe that certain sudden accesses of fear, of horror, that I have had occasionally were physical. Why I think that, is because I have no difficulty in approaching and being approached by good spirits—by my father, for instance—and there is nothing that stands in my way in concentration or meditation. When I go to my room for that, I feel safer than ever. But I have had occasionally moments of awful blackness, a blackness that I can hardly describe to you, that does not seem really to belong to me. It is just that which is terrifying."

"But that is all?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And do other people know when these blacknesses are with you?" he said.

"It is a question I have never asked anyone," said she; "but I feel sure they do. They cannot help it. For instance,"—she flushed a little—"I know that I squint horribly when they are on me. They are rare, you understand, but I can remember two or three."

"But they never came between you and prayer," he said.

"No, never."

He paused a moment.

"I am sure you are safe," he said. "Now I will tell you what I can."

He drew his chair rather closer to the girl.

"On that night," he said, "you know the night I mean, you were in the direst and most imminent peril. It, Set-nekht, had actually entered, had begun to take possession of you. Luckily, however, if you remember, I awoke the medium almost immediately: the possession was not complete. About that—the phenomenon of incomplete possession—I learned in my travels last autumn; it is a long story, and does not concern us now; that the possession was incomplete is enough. Well, as I said, I got into communication with Set-nekht, and learned this, that though he is, so to speak, loosed again, and is a control of the most powerful and evil kind, yet I, by the fact of my having loosed him, can in a certain way control him. He cannot, through my command, advance except I bid him. He may roam, I suppose, in the places of his previous haunting—no Arab, for instance, will now go near the precinct of that temple after dark—but outside those, so I am sure, I can control him. So with regard to you, I hold him bound: he cannot advance an inch except I bid him. Therefore, my dear Miss Ida, you are safe—absolutely safe. It is all as if it had never happened: you may for ever from this moment dismiss from your head all thought of what has been, or what may be, like a year-old dream that seemed at the time of dreadful import, since, in the merciful decrees of God, the fulfilment of it is no longer possible."

He laid great stress on the last word, his voice sinking to a mere whisper charged with emotion. Yet Ida did not at once respond: like a millrace a hundred impossible sequels flashed through her mind. What if this, and what if that, and what if the other . . . But her pause, though full, was but short, and she put out her hand.

"I owe you more than my life," she said. "My mere life is but a tiny stake to what I have feared was on the board."

Then, even while her hand was in his, she drew back a little, for in those dark eyes that met hers she saw that look which she saw every day and every hour in the eyes of her

lover; but he was fair and blue-eyed, and this one was dark as the pit, yet the same voice spoke from the eyes of each.

"Your debt, then, is cancelled," said Henderson, "and you owe me nothing. I, on the contrary, owe you very much, the privilege to have been able to help you—and to help is a vastly greater privilege than to harm. Let us make a compact, Miss Ida: let us never refer to the matter again, and banish it utterly from our thoughts. It is better so."

"Ah, with all my heart," she said. "Yet you cannot cancel my debt to you. That must endure beyond the end of time."

He shook his head.

"It is done," he said; "it is all quite finished with."

In dumb show he made the movement as of tearing a paper in half and throwing it away. Then, for the avoidance of embarrassment, he went on at once:

"I have so much to tell you," he said, "so much, too, that seems to students like you and me to be of absolutely vital import. Here in England even those who are most advanced are but babies in knowledge. They keep thinking that they may be meddling with things that are evil that had better not be meddled with, for fear of dire, impossible consequences."

He paused a moment.

"Now, what I have learned which is most important of all is this, that the only evil which exists is evil of our own intention. You cannot step into casual evil as you can step on a piece of orange-peel, which somebody else has left there, and thus fall. That is not allowed. It is also inconceivable."

"But last March . . . It?" asked Ida.

"That is an admirable instance of what I am saying. I approached it in the spirit of pure inquiry. Therefore it has no evil power over me. All its strength, which is great, is my slave. I can turn it, so I believe, on and off, as the driver of an engine turns the regulator."

"But the whole thing—the tragedy, father's death," said she, stumbling a little over the words.

"Ah, one must go lightly there, yet he knows now," said Henderson. "For he approached it not in the spirit of inquiry only: he had been warned, by what he believed to be a good influence, not to make the attempt. He believed

that, you see—it is that which makes the difference. Therefore for him it was evil. All magic is white to the white. You will pardon my speaking thus.”

Instinctively Ida had drawn back from him; he saw it, and his rebuke was admirably gentle.

“You should never be afraid of the truth,” he said. “Truth is the one thing in the world in which fear is dissolved. It is only lies and ignorance which can harm one.”

That was sufficiently arresting.

“But are there not terrible truths?” she asked. “Supposing, for instance, you had found out that It had power over me. That would have been a terrible truth.”

He waved this aside, with a show, anyhow, of reason.

“Ah, but I could not find that out, because it was not so,” he said. “And it was not so, because it could not be so.”

“Then, all these things which have been made known to you, and which you must tell me of,” said she, “all this new occult lore into which you have penetrated, is there nothing in it all that you shun—is there no evil path indicated which is not the true way? Is there no such thing as Black Magic?”

Henderson shook his head.

“We are like savages,” he said. “We call evil that which we do not understand. It is only our own blindness, our own fear, that makes evil.”

Then the man’s face glowed with a sudden strength and earnestness.

“Ah, root out fear from the world,” he said, “and I will show you the kingdom of heaven.”

The coincidence was too extraordinary not to strike her.

“How wonderful that you should say that!” said she, “for not long ago I received practically the same message from my father. He said, ‘Evil is approaching, but be not afraid.’”

“And that strikes you as a coincidence?” asked he. “Surely not: you might as well say that it was a coincidence that two clocks struck twelve at the same moment. It is not a coincidence at all: it is only that they both tell the time correctly.”

There was a moment’s silence.

“You are in communication with him?” asked Henderson.

"Yes, but not very frequently. Abdul rather discourages it. He urges me instead to closer and more constant concentration. He says—and I think rightly—that no communion with other spirits can be closer than our own meditative communion with them, if only we are concentrated enough. He regards all communication through mediums really as an access given to those whose faith is not sufficiently strong."

Henderson made no comment to this. Then, "Abdul?" he asked. "Ah, I remember him. You have him with you still? He is a medium, if I remember right? I think Sir Henry told me about him. A very remarkable story."

Ida got up and walked softly up and down the room once or twice.

"What you say interests me indescribably, Mr. Henderson," she said. "I, too, have so often felt that nothing which one approaches in a right spirit, a spirit of which one's conscience does not disapprove, can bring one to harm. Yet last March think of the awful power to which I was exposed——"

"Which was averted, however," said Henderson; "it could not really hurt you. The fact that you were then in the right spirit—with the design, that is to say, to save your father—was the arm stretched out to save you. Ah, it is the old story which is always new, so everlastingly true: power is given over devils to those that believe, to cast them out, and if they eat any deadly thing it shall not hurt them."

She looked up at him quickly.

"Yes, yes," she said.

"How can it be otherwise?" said he. "The vital principle of good is for ever stronger than and predominant over the lethal principle of evil. Life is stronger than death, and light than darkness. Otherwise this moment the world would sink back into original chaos."

"I believe that," said she softly.

"No, dear Miss Ida," said he, "you only believe in these things in the abstract, which is not belief at all. You will excuse me, but though you believe in them as a principle, you do not believe in the principle being proved in individual instances. For if you once set your house in order, turn your face resolutely, as you have always done, towards the

light, there is nothing in the world that can make you afraid: no risk or danger exists for you. Yet all this summer you have been afraid. I don't say you have been afraid every hour, every day, but fear has been of the household of your soul. Fear crouched in your face, ready to spring and tear you when I came in half an hour ago."

He paused a moment.

"Others, too, desire so much to convince you of that truth," he said—"to see you afraid of nothing, calling nothing black, nothing evil."

Abdul, his devotion and his warnings, came into her mind.

"My father, you mean," she said. "But I communicate often with him. I am satisfied: I do not want more. I would not get a more material vision of him even if I could."

Again Henderson paused, and as he paused an idea leaped into his mind.

"But what of him?" he asked. "Is it not possible that he wants more? Are you sure that he is satisfied too?"

This, again, was arresting; it was a possibility of which never the faintest adumbration had come into her mind; and Ida stopped opposite him in her walk, with questioning eyes fixed on his, and poised on her step like some beautiful slim Greek statue, head erect, with an incomparable ease and grace of carriage. And even while she paused, the door opened and Abdul entered. He had come merely to give her the answers to the two notes she had entrusted him with. He had taken only two steps inside the room, but stopped there, looking with long, fascinated gaze at Henderson, as if his eyes were glued to him.

The latter nodded to him.

"You remember me, I see," he said quite coolly. "And you will be rejoiced to hear that I have been the bearer of good tidings. Your mistress is safe."

Then the terror and tension of Abdul's face relaxed: neither fear nor hatred could be so strong as the immensity of that relief, and in this first moment he could not pause to consider on what the assertion rested, what were the terms of it; but instinctively knowing that he heard the truth, with hands outstretched he advanced to Henderson.

"Blessed are they that bear good tidings," he cried, "that bring peace to the house that has been troubled."

"And to the house of trouble comes peace also," said the other.

Abdul said no more, but gave the notes to Ida and withdrew. Henderson looked after his retreating figure.

"How he hates me!" he remarked as the door closed behind him. "Just at this moment, perhaps, relief and gratitude to him who has brought good news is uppermost in his mind, but it is only like a bird perched there on some huge tree of hatred. He fears me, too: hatred and fear are always much akin."

Ida felt bound to champion the man who had removed the weight of the earth and the things under the earth from her.

"He shall not," she cried; "he cannot now. I will see to that."

A French clock chimed low and silvery from the mantelpiece, and Henderson turned to it.

"Good gracious!" he said. "I must go at once. I am later for my next appointment than is really decent. Yes, I am a man of appointments now," he said, laughing, "and all sorts of great folk want me to give them five minutes. And I find those sets of five minutes add up to a dreadful figure. To-night at eight, then. And, Miss Ida, I cannot possibly give you any idea of what an extraordinary happiness it has been to me to see you again, and tell you what I have told you."

Ida shook hands.

"You must tell me more," she said—"you must tell me much more."

She hesitated a moment.

"And I am being selfish?" she asked. "You think that others—that my father—is not satisfied."

"I will tell you more," said Henderson, with a secret pleasure in seeing that the little seed he had sown was already sprouting in her mind.

Ida threw herself down in a chair when he had gone, and, without conscious or definite train of thought, just opened the door and windows of her mind to what had happened, feeling only that it was pure bliss just to let her mind sit and bask in the sunlight that had dawned on her. How black, how terrible, had been that little hidden spot in her mind she had not known until it had been removed. It had

been to her like a little box with a spring lid labelled "Death," containing unimaginable ghastliness; and though again and again her conscious self had quite forgotten it, yet she knew now that from some unconscious hidden vital part of herself there had never been absent the fear of the terrible groping fingers of some hidden agency, which, whether from mere idle meddling or from set and malicious purpose, might touch the spring and let free what lurked within the box. Fear, as Henderson had said, had been of the household of her soul. But now she knew that that box was no longer lying out in the vast deeps of the spirit-world; it was in the custody of a man, human like herself, not of the enchanted and wandering spirits of evil. No human being could ever play false in a matter like this to even his most abhorred enemy. And that she knew she was not to Henderson.

Peace! When he told her first, peace had not come at once. Some deep unconscious fibres of her inner self had too long been vibrating with a thousand menaces of danger to be stilled and quiescent at once, even as at the moment when mere physical danger is definitely over, the heart still thumps as loudly or even more loudly than when the danger was imminent, and the knees are still weak and wavering. But as she sat inert, at rest in her big chair after Henderson had gone, slowly there stole through all the channels and passages of her soul, like some cool incoming tide, the sense of security, of freedom from gnawing, scratching doubt. Often during this last summer some perfectly simple little domestic scene had, without her knowing any reason for it, sent her sick with sheer envy and knowledge of how far security was distant from herself. Once it had been the sight of Tom's wife (the gardener to whom Mrs. Desmond had spoken such winged words on the subject of open windows), looking at the first efforts towards locomotive progress on the part of her baby. The young mother had sat at her cottage door while this brave inheritor of the ages essayed to cross a two-yard space of grass; tenderness, love, watchfulness, all stood sentinel in her eyes as, completely absorbed, she watched the tiny random staggering of infant footsteps. On another occasion Ida had found herself looking with the same unfathomable sense of envy at a bed of mignonette in a sheltered corner. It was lowly of growth,

but fragrant; like the lilies of the field, it neither toiled nor span, yet Solomon—less glorious—was uneasy on his throne; and, ah, how vastly more uneasy was she, a girl who to all the world appeared so favoured by fortune, and by the adorning hand of youth and Nature! Instance after instance flashed into her mind: the emotion had been inexplicable then, but now she had the key to it. She, too, at last had inward peace—peace that at last pervaded her, and did not touch only the surfaces of life, leaving the depths below in hidden turmoil of foam and surges, but in the depths there was peace also.





ELEVENTH

AS Ida had anticipated, it was only natural that, if the lion could be secured at so short a notice, the jackals—a word not invidiously used—would be able to attend also, even though they had to perjure themselves in the matter of previous engagements. And though the roaring of the lion was not that of a sucking dove, it was roaring of the most intelligent and interesting description. Henderson was always a clear and apt conversationalist, and he was quite a stranger to that offensive form of modesty which refuses to wear its honours at all, when it has been especially asked, so to speak, to its own coronation. With more becoming attitude he wore them—modestly indeed, in that he did not brag, but quite openly and sincerely; he was not that most embarrassing phenomenon, a great man ashamed of greatness. And since this party was quite clearly assembled to hear him, if he would be so kind, tell them something about his wonderful adventures, he proceeded to do so, talking at first only to Mrs. Desmond, whom he took in to dinner, but soon, since conversation languished all round the table—if, indeed, the word can be applied to the breathless interest which followed his sentences—speaking to the guests at large. Yet even at the end of some period, punctuated by the proper desire for food, his eyes sought, not directly, but by oblique methods, stopping, so to speak, at wayside eyes, the eyes of Ida, and as often found hers resting on his.

“I was telling Mrs. Desmond,” he said, raising his voice a little when it was foolish to pretend that the dozen other guests were not engaging in conversation of their own, but eagerly listening to hear what he said, “a few details about a rather interesting journey I took a month or two ago, to an oasis west of Wady-Halfa. I applied to the British Government”—and he looked across to Sir James Denton a

moment with a smile—"which quite properly refused me the Imperial protection."

Sir James swelled a little with official self-consciousness. It was barely necessary to touch Sir James in order to find the official: the official, indeed, was always on as well as under the surface.

"We can't protect spirit-rapping, Mr. Henderson," said he; "to complicate the fiscal problem with the psychical would really tax us too much."

"And the working man," remarked Hugh Arnold, who had that sort of intelligence which cannot resist playing into an opening for quasi-repartee.

Sir James beamed, rather ponderously, like the sun through a sea-mist. It was quite evident he was going to make a joke.

"The tax on spirits is unpopular enough in their restricted sense," he said. "We must not add Mr. Henderson's."

This would not do at all for Mrs. Desmond. On ordinary occasions she delighted in this sort of pea-shooting round the table, but to pea-shoot when really the biggest lion of the year was present was waste of time.

"West from Wady-Halfa," she said to Henderson in the manner of a theatrical prompter suggesting his lines to a forgetful actor.

Henderson laughed.

"I despair of converting Sir James," he said. "But he must do me the justice to admit I never really tried. I went just the same without further argument."

He paused a moment and took some *entrée*.

"Now, the man who finds it most easy to get about in rather strange places in the East," he said, "is a doctor. He travels really much more unchallenged than the British Grenadier, partly, perhaps, because he himself challenges less. My progress at first, therefore, I confess, was charlatan in character, for I am sure I know less about doctoring than anybody present. But I do know that vaccination is a probable preventive against small-pox, and also a palliative even when the disease is declared. So I bought a lancet from an army doctor at Halfa, and stole, I am sorry to say, though I had offered to buy it, only my offer was rejected with incredulous scorn, some Government lymph. I did this

because I knew that Abou Rasch, some three days' journey from Halfa, was being decimated by small-pox. So I went straight to Abou Rasch, giving out that I was a wonderful doctor who could cure by means of a little knife and a drop of water."

He paused a moment.

"Vaccination is a most simple operation," he said. "You cut a little hole, and fill it up with Government lymph, getting it thoroughly in. It is a good thing then to murmur an Arabic blessing. Personally I think my Arabic blessings—because I let them have it strong, for whether you bless or curse, it is no use doing it in any half-hearted manner, so I blessed a man's great-grandfather and all collateral branches, upwards and downwards, that I could remember—had a prodigious effect. At Abou Rasch, then, I stopped three weeks. By that time the small-pox had stopped: and I had got—how shall I say it—a certain position already, and went on. But there I made a most important discovery: it was that if you can go three days' journey on a lancet, you can go thirty days on occultism, if—if you know the right sort. But, like the blessings, it, too, has to be strong. It can't be too strong."

He looked round the table, and again his eye caught Ida's. This time he did not at once look away, but faced her steadily a moment with intention, and the look that passed between them was understood by them both, though by no other present.

"Now I am going to say things which will seem to almost all of you, almost all of you," he repeated, "absolute nonsense, sheer meaningless fantastic nonsense. All the same, I make this offer, that if anyone else tries to go where I have been, except by force of arms or in possession of the power of some master-word like mine, I will give him a thousand pounds for every Arab he passes in desert or oasis west of Abou Rasch without being attacked. The facts, anyhow, are these, and anybody is, of course, perfectly at liberty to laugh or to say 'Pshaw!' I shall, however, repeat them at greater length and in greater detail to the Royal Society.

"There are two classes in Egypt, though the two classes, so to speak, exist in almost every individual in the land: it would, in fact, be more correct to say that every Arab is of dual nature. The classes are 'Obvious Egypt,' which in-

cludes high-minded politicians, soldiers, and swindling donkey-boys; and the other is 'Occult Egypt,' which includes exactly the same persons. I can whisper something into the ears of any donkey-boy, and he will go pale with fright: I whisper the same thing into the ear of an influential member of the Supreme Government, and he will say—well, he will say, 'My house is your house.' They are a nation, in fact, who believe—really believe, I mean—in magic. No wonder.

"Now, in the evenings at Abou Rasch I used to sit at the cafés and talk magic. At least, for a certain time I listened, and when I was sure of my ground I began to talk, for really I knew much more than they. As a doctor, however, I was safe enough, and it amused me for a time, with a miser-like kind of delight, to hoard my knowledge and my master-word. My attendant there, whom I have brought with me to England, was a boy from Luxor, called Mohammed, the most sensitive medium, by the way, I have ever seen."

Ida suddenly shuddered, and her hand, that was on the stem of her wine-glass, trembled violently, so that the wine was spilled. But she was many places distant from Henderson: he did not see what had happened.

"Now, the Egyptians revere, as hidden and immensely powerful masters of magic," he went on, "the people of old, whose temples we enlightened Englishmen dig up, whose tombs we desecrate, and whose mummies we place in the British Museum and other public places where the public does not come. They believe that the spirits of many of them still haunt the land, but hitherto the modern masters in occult science have not been able to raise or control them. But I produced before them an experiment"—again his eyes strayed round the table, and in their circuit rested for a moment on Ida—"which made them think, and with, I believe, perfect justice, that one of these spirits of the ancient Egyptians was, so to speak, going about and under my control. However, I will not bore you with the unconvincing details of this, for I am sure you would not believe them. I need only tell you that, after a séance I held there at Abou Rasch, I had no need to pretend to be a doctor any more, or even an Arab, and I went forward alone with Mohammed and a couple of horse-boys, as safe as if I was in the inside of a

British square. Instantly also every source of information was at my disposal. Instead of being hated and feared, as an Englishman would be, I was anyhow welcomed, though perhaps feared as well.

"Now, anyone who knows Egypt well—that is to say, knows the inwardness of Egypt, not the obvious Egypt which a dozen books will give you the bones of—will have heard, though only as a fable or a myth, of the great Zaffiri oasis. Mothers tell their children stories of it, how it lies in a desert of golden sand, and how the people who live there live to an immense age, and are the wisest of all men, and are whiter of skin than the English. Well, all that is perfectly true. The sands round the oasis are literally golden. A man with a couple of camels can bring home a load of sand which will yield enough gold for him to make a circlet for his wife's neck. And the folk are white, and never have I come across such wise ones. I know all this because I have been there."

"Too exciting! Pray go on, dear Mr. Henderson," said Mrs. Desmond.

"Well, I set out from Abou Rasch, and travelled straight on for three weeks, or, to be more accurate, twenty-three days. As I approached any oasis the village came out to meet me, and gave me all I required, and besought my protection. The news, in fact, of what had happened at Abou Rasch had preceded me, and they believed I was the master of an old Egyptian spirit."

Then Ida looked up, and as she spoke her voice shook a little.

"Set-nekht?" she asked.

For the moment Henderson was a little disconcerted; somehow, it seemed to him scarcely right that even that name should be on those beautiful lips.

"Yes, Set-nekht," he said; then, feeling that so brusque an assent might be construed into rudeness, "Our Luxor friend," he added lightly—"the man, perhaps, you remember to have built the temple of Mut, and to have had a memorial chamber in the temple of Deir-el-Baharia across the river."

Certainly the lion roared most satisfactorily, roared, too, with the right graphic tone of the true traveller, the man, that is, who not only visits places, but sees them with a vision

that, though true, is romantic, and invests what he has visited with something of his own vividness. And in this manner he went on to tell them of this extraordinary oasis, cut off from everything but itself, and to the mind of the fellahin the Mecca of occult lore, and the very fountain-head of the powers that are unfathomable. Of his spiritualistic experiences there he said little, but described with wonderful vividness the strangeness of the spot, as large as Yorkshire, and of illimitable fertility—and with his kindled eye, his half-Southern brightness of face and phrase, his low persuasive voice, he was like some Pied Piper of Hamelin, charming his unresisting circle—he spoke of this fairyland which he had visited, spoke of it, too, as a fairyland, yet as of a definite spot on this round unromantic earth, a fairyland which had its prosaic latitude and longitude. He wiled them with his tale, and at his wiling the honey-bee would have left the flower, and the moth have fluttered round him as at a candle. Of what to them was at the most vague hearsay, he made sober, travelled truth. He had visited this sand-girt isle of Atlantis; fruits grew there which no other man had eaten of, which no botanist had crucified with unpronounceable names: he flung a gold bracelet on the table which passed from hand to hand, exquisite in workmanship, and of pattern unknown to any. Two crossing spirals composed it; it was either the work of a novice or of a jeweller returning to simplicity by way of knowledge. Other gems were shown also—an enormous uncut cat's-eye, a peridot cut and faceted, but as large as a pigeon's egg: these were tossed out as evidence where evidence was not needed, for the whole story bore truth stamped on it: it was its own evidence; anything material in confirmation of it was immaterial.

Then, orator-like, he saw in all faces that his fairy-tale, for such it appeared, had gone home, and, with transition so swift that one would have sworn that no transition was there, he suddenly turned to psychical matters.

"All that I have told you is nothing," he said. "I have just been talking of the externals of what I saw. That peridot—thanks, very much, if everyone has finished looking at it—and the cat's-eye—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Desmond! pray keep it: really, I brought it to give you, and if you cut it down it will make a nice gem. Yes. For I did not go

there for peridots or cat's-eyes, nor yet the sands of gold. I went there for knowledge. I have got"—and he paused—"I have got a little."

True or not, the thing was brilliantly done. Mrs. Desmond made a hurried disclaimer, and laid the lump of cat's-eye down by his plate, for, fond as she was of jewels, she was just now more enraptured by his tale. Dinner was over: cigarettes had already been handed, but Sir James, at any rate, though a confirmed and deep-breathing smoker, put his down uninhaled by his plate when Henderson spoke again. He himself had paused to light one, and drew a long breath of it before he leaned forward over the table, while the crisp smell of it spread slowly over the room.

There was dead silence: those who, like Ida, had cause to be more interested in what he was going to say were not more breathless than Sir James. For a man who can take his audience over the map of the desert westward from Wady-Halfa for five hundred miles, and that in the most prosaic geographical manner, reserving all the romance for what he saw there, could not help being interesting to a Government official.

"I got a little," he repeated. "I got to see that all knowledge is right. Nothing that one can learn or know can hurt one, provided only that one wishes to know and learn. I stayed in the Zaffiri oasis for two months. I talked with white people about the mysteries of life and death, and chiefly I talked on the extreme falsity of that line which alludes to the bourne from which no traveller returns. That traveller returns every day. As we all know, the spirit set free at the hour of death often revisits those who are tied to it by friendship and blood. But spirits much more remote can be made to return. I learned a great deal about the laws that govern such things in my long stay among the Zaffiri."

A sound which is usually represented by the word "pshaw" escaped Sir James: he really could not stand any more of this. But Henderson had allowed anyone either to laugh or to say "pshaw!"—the breach of manners was authorized.

"My dear Mr. Henderson," he said, "you are indescribably interesting. Pray give us some account of the legal system of this wonderful people."

Henderson again caught Ida's glance, as if to ask her what he should do. He wished to take his cue from her, for she more than all present had the right to know more if she wished, or if she wished to stop him.

"Yes, do, Mr. Henderson," she said. "I am sure their institutions must be as engrossing as themselves."

Then she turned to her neighbour.

"Little prosaic details help one to realize a person or a people so much better than accounts of their beliefs and ideas," she said. "One learns more about the Duke of Wellington by seeing his little camp-bed than by reading his despatches."

Hugh Arnold laughed.

"That is quite true," he said. "I have always held that view. In fact, I am writing a short essay on the value of hats as a key to character. Let us hear about the Zaffiris hats. Or don't they wear any? If that is the case, we learn more not only about them, but about their climate."





TWELFTH

THE hats of the Zaffiris, to use Hugh Arnold's phrase as a compendious expression to signify the geographical, ethnological, historical, and exploratory interests in Henderson's journey, certainly had an enormous success in London, and he lectured before various learned societies to their great edification. But even more marked was the social success of Zaffiri hats, when the hats, so to speak, were rather differently trimmed, being on these other occasions abundantly adorned with ribands and bows of occultism. All London just now was agog about matters spiritualistic, and Henderson's experiences of Zaffiri magic were even more exciting than the more material aspect of the hats. He had with him, too, this extraordinary Arab medium, Mohammed, who produced the most astounding phenomena, and there was a regular invasion in spiritualistic circles of the deceased mothers and grandmothers, uncles and aunts, fathers and grandfathers, of the frequenters of séances. Indeed, in a week or two from Henderson's arrival in London, when he had stated publicly more than once the superficial results, so to speak, of his journey, the interest excited by that which was not superficial far transcended the other, and ethnologists, geographers, historians, and explorers rather shook their heads over a man who, with so much of solid interest to impart, devoted himself to mere charlatanism. But the so-called charlatans were delighted with him.

Now, the epithet which, perhaps, out of the whole of the English language was least applicable to Henderson was "foolish." There was really nothing whatever in common between his mind and the mind of a fool, and it took him a very short time to see that it was as a spiritualist, a mesmerist, as the controller of this extraordinary medium whom he had brought with him, that his great success

might be achieved. Zaffiri was all very well in its way: it had served its purpose admirably in making him a man of mark, and, indeed, Sir James had already offered him a "small Government post" of a Secret Service type, which he had decided to decline with thanks. And here again the conspicuous absence of foolishness was evident. For to decline a thing leads to one of two results: either the matter is closed, which, if that was all they proposed to offer him, Henderson was quite willing that it should be; or the refusal may give rise to a larger offer. Henderson himself inclined to think that a larger offer was already in contemplation, and in the meantime he saw his way to establishing himself in a very important position among that enormous mass of people in England who were interested in occult matters. How big that mass was he was frankly surprised to find: he was suddenly the centre of a really large and important body of inquirers.

Here again he showed his good sense, and gave himself out openly as a professional spiritualist. He had no patience with the doctrine because the profession in question is one concerning spiritual and not carnal things, therefore the professor should be too lofty of soul to accept emoluments for his skill, instancing the endowment for Chairs of Divinity at the Universities and the comfortable incomes enjoyed by Bishops. Instead he projected a set of lectures on spiritualistic subjects at rather high fees, and of séances, which, being practical and also quite distinctly sensational, appealed on the whole to a much wider audience than theory, however solidly founded. One or two of these he gave almost immediately on his return to England, with results that startled psychicists in this country and really slightly alarmed them. There were no concertinas, no vague messages from another world, no ringing of bells, but materializations which were quite of a different character to the Tooting type of Birdie. Mohammed, moreover, who apparently shared the general fearful attitude of his countrymen with regard to his master, absolutely refused to exercise his mediumistic powers for anybody else, and when the president of a certain psychical society approached him with an offer that for the moment made him gasp, he got, when the gasp—it was a mere momentary be-dazzlement—was over, a stream of mingled Arabic and Eng-

lish which he rightly interpreted, though only understanding some third of it, to mean that Mohammed declined it, as far as could be gathered from his tone, without thanks.

It was about a fortnight after Henderson's dinner with Mrs. Desmond: she and Ida had gone next day down into the country, and had left with him an open invitation to invite himself for a few days whenever he could. This at present was impossible, for he was busy from morning till night still "exploding," as he put it, in all possible directions, and in a thoroughly loud and businesslike manner. He had also to prepare the set of lectures he was going to give in London during February, and until he had broken the back of the work of these he could not think of accepting the invitation. At the same time, he longed with extraordinary intensity to see Ida again, but since he had determined not to move till he had made real way with his work, he adopted the very sensible plan of attending very strictly to the latter, instead of allowing thoughts of the former to interfere with it, retard his progress, and thus postpone the hour he longed for.

It was a gloomy winter morning, with a heavy, dripping sky sitting low and yellow above the house-roofs, and, rising early by electric light, he found that the same artificial illumination was necessary as he worked after breakfast, so ineffectual was the mere celestial beam. To him, fresh from the brilliant skies and flooding suns of the South, London seemed an inferno of the lowest rounds as regards the physical conditions of air and light and climate under which life had to be pursued. But he never wasted regret on the irremediable, holding that regret but emphasizes the effect and depression of conditions which one would like to change but cannot, and he let neither the face of Ida nor the desire for sun get between him and his page to dull or obscure it. On the table by him were several books of reference, a couple of note-books of his own jottings, and an open Bible. He referred very constantly to this.

Now, but it was not on religious or doctrinal points that he consulted the Bible. It bore, however, very directly on his work, and he believed that his audience would agree with him. For the scope of part of his first lecture was to trace rapidly the data we have on the world-wide phenomena

which may be called occult, and the Bible seemed to him to be full of such allusions; and coming from this book, he justly judged that his audience would find them weightier than instances from obscure and recondite works. Henderson fully believed that occult power came from where all other power came from—namely, from the Spirit of Life which controls all spirits and all material things—and when Balak sent to Balaam messengers with “the rewards of divination,” this seemed to show that he was, in modern phrase, paying a medium who was possessed of second-sight, and whose profession was clairvoyance. Again, Peter’s friends, hearing a knocking at the door, when they believed him to be dead, supposed the knocking to be produced by his angel, his spirit. Again, a man’s hand, visibly seen, wrote on the wall of the banquet-chamber the doom of Belshazzar: to Daniel there came and touched him “one like the appearance of a man.” Uriel, the angel, caused Esdras to fall into many trances—Uriah was his “control,” as we should say now, so Henderson noted: a spirit passed before Job’s face: Elisha was a clairaudient, and told the King of Israel the words spoken in bedchambers: a voice came to Peter bidding him kill and eat: to Elisha, again, there came a writing from Elijah the prophet after he had passed from the earth. Instances might be multiplied indefinitely.

Now, it was this theme, the reconciliation of spiritualism with Christianity, that occupied him this morning. He knew well that there were certain to be many in his audience who had a feeling, lurking or apparent, that spiritualism was “not quite right,” not quite consistent with the Christian habit of mind, and it was this view which it was his object, in taking from the Bible phenomena that seemed to him in all points similar to those of modern spiritualism, to combat and, if possible, overthrow. Whether he himself would have given up spiritualism if it had been his opinion that it was contrary to the spirit of Christianity is a situation which need not be considered, since it did not arise: he found, on the other hand, that instances of clairvoyance, of clairaudience, of spirit-rapping, of materialization, occurred in both Old and New Testament, not branded, as it were, with the verdict of witchcraft, but spoken of as right and proper communications with the unseen world, that “cloud of witnesses” that encompass us, often if not always ready, did we but know

the right approach, to draw near to teach, to speak, and to be seen. In all times and in all countries, so he held, certain individuals were endowed with this particular gift of being able to be the wire, so to speak, through which the message from one world passed to another. In the Bible they were called seers, nowadays mediums: the two were synonymous terms for those gifted with this particular power.

Henderson was a very rapid worker: his thoughts came to him with clear, sharp-cut edges, and it was in clear and sharp-cut words, plucked and skinned, showing the muscles and the bones of his argument, that he set them down. This morning before he ceased work, he came to the end of his first lecture, and in order to begin to familiarize himself with it, since he preferred to learn what he was to say almost by heart before its delivery, he reread aloud the concluding pages which he had just written. He sat very upright in his chair, and spoke slowly, as if he was even now before his audience, making his points with outstretched finger or with dabs and dashes of the manuscript he held.

"We have seen, then," he read, "that practically every form of spirit-communication known to us now has its counterpart and parallel in these instances, briefly related and selected out of a vast quantity of kindred phenomena, in the powers of Biblical seers—seers, that is to say, who are definitely regarded as being inspired by Jehovah, and gifted by him with what they called then, and we call now, the open vision. I have laid great stress on this point, and have taken up much of your time in discussing it, because I am aware that there are many, some of whom may be here to-day, who at heart feel that in investigating these matters they may be doing something dubious and dangerous, and even evil. Many, for instance, many, too, of those who are often called adepts, teach that the materialization of spirits is, so to speak, an illegal operation: they tell us that to materialize a spirit in itself may have the effect of making that spirit earth-bound, while to wish to have the sight, the ocular evidence, of the continued existence of one who has passed over the narrow sea, presupposes in the inquirer a want of faith. They will tell you also that this truth, for so they call it, meaning by truth that which they happen to believe, has been made known to them by spirits with whom they were in

communication. I do not for a moment question the validity of their doubt as concerns themselves; no doubt it is not right for such to inquire in this way. But search as we may, we can find no authority for such a view as a general principle, and the reluctance of such a medium to materialize I unhesitatingly set down to his want of power; while as for the view that to desire such a thing implies a want of faith on the part of the inquirer, the inconsistency is almost too patent to need pointing out. For wherein is the sight a less spiritual gift than the hearing, or more carnal than it? and how can we with any show of reason assume that to hear a loved voice is permissible, yet to see a loved face is not? Where is the difference? A manifestation is made to a mortal sense: eyes or ears, what matters it?

"So in these séances which I am going to give, you will, I hope, not only hear voices, but see sights, since the distinction (though I will grant that the sense of hearing is more easily tricked, and that to materialize a form demands a higher degree of psychical power than to make a voice audible) appears to me purely arbitrary, and is evidence only of want of power on the part of the medium. So come prepared and ready for any manifestation that may be granted to us, though what manifestation it may be I can no more tell you than what will be the weather this day twelve-months, and, above all, root fear out of your hearts, since unbelief itself is not so great an enemy to progress as fear. Your disbelief may be shattered without your will consenting, but fear puts you into far more active opposition, since you fear that of which you are ignorant. And remember always that down the length of the Way shines that Light too bright to be to us openly and fully manifested, and there is no corner, no obscurity, which, if we will but open our eyes, it does not wholly illuminate. And in that Light let us go forward."

The last sheet dropped from Henderson's hand and sidled with twists and turns on to the floor, but he sat there without getting up, looking fixedly in front of him. There was not a word he had read that had not been written with set and definite purpose: each word, indeed, was a two-edged weapon; it cut two ways, and the edges were these:

First there was the study and pursuit to which he devoted his life, on behalf of which he would quite simply and cheerfully have died, had he been convinced that his death would be more favourable to knowledge than his life—namely, the study of occult science and the possible goal to which that study might lead. Like a pendant from that, it is true, hung personal ambition, but the pendant, to do him justice, was very small; and whatever position or affluence his success might bring him, these, too, in turn he would certainly place at the disposal of the aim itself. Until the last year that had been the whole object of his life: now, he was aware, there was another, a sun of different though not less luminousness.

Ida! He thought, it could hardly be said with shame, of the scheme which had originally filled his mind on that day he passed alone after that first awful séance in the temple of Mut, but with amazed wonder at the psychological change that had come over him with regard to her. From the first, it is true, he admired her beauty and envied her wealth; now, so he told himself, had she been penniless he would have sought her; had she not been beautiful—— But there he paused, for her beauty was too vital and essential a part of her to be severed from her. Whatever his love for her was, it included that: that was a vital part of it.

And it was by his work, that twin passion of his heart, by his knowledge of those spiritualistic matters which were as intense and as real a part of the girl's life as they were of his own, that he looked for his best approach to her heart. Here he could help her, advance her in knowledge, and he knew well that no service that could be rendered her could be so prized by her as that. But he must get her, so he told himself, from out of the shelter of the shield of the savage love and protection that Abdul, whom from the bottom of his heart he despised as a mere dabbler in the froth of the waves of the great sea that stretched from now to eternity, extended over her. For Abdul, as he knew well, distrusted and hated him, and ignorantly labelled his investigations as a meddling with Black Magic, simply because the matter was unintelligible to him, outside his own power. Thus, he was a bar to Henderson's own approach to Ida, for it was by giving her manifestations which he was sure Abdul could not give, and would most emphatically not ap-

prove, that his way of access, of making himself indispensable to her, lay most clearly open. In this matter his delay in at present speaking to her directly had been a wise move: and in the interval he had found out how deeply she longed, though she was at present disposed—thanks to Abdul—to label her longing as faithlessness, to get into closer and more constant communication with her father. It was this that Henderson believed he could procure for her, having once convinced her that Abdul's scruples were, as he seriously thought them, but old-wives' tales, the fear of children on a beach at the waves that hammered on the rocks. And the lecture which he had just finished might prepare the way. Again he had already made a good beginning; for he could not help knowing how deep, how heartfelt, was Ida's gratitude to him for the good news he had brought her, which had removed from her mind that black and secret spot which for all these months had lurked and lived in the dark places of her soul. Anyhow, she was deeply, sincerely grateful to him, and though Henderson was too clear-sighted to confuse gratitude with love, he knew that gratitude is no bad foundation on which the airier fabric, sunlit and wind-caressed, may some day arise.

And there his thoughts paused, but for a time the echoes of that last strain lingered as music lingers in vaulting after the keys of the organ which has bellowed out its "mournful fugue" are silent. Then, suddenly recalling himself to the present hour, he drew a sheet of paper towards him and wrote:

"DEAR MISS IDA,

"I am sending you, as you asked me, my first lecture, which I have just finished writing. I shall be most interested to know whether you agree with my views and conclusions, and should so much value any criticism you may send me. I am afraid you may find it rather dry and bony, but one must, I think, get the skeleton right, or else one cannot hope to get the flesh and external features correct, for they all depend on the bones.

"And I hope so much in about a week's time to announce myself as able to accept your most kind and elastic invitation, as I think that by then I should have made sufficient

progress with the set to let me leave this hermit's life which is mine at present.

"Yours sincerely,

"JIM HENDERSON.

"P. S.—May I ask you not to show what I have sent you to your servant Abdul? I fancy I should be more double-dyed in his eyes than ever, and he, if I heard his comments, more narrow and bigoted in mine."

Vigorously as London in general hunted him, and lavishly though it strove to feed him, this particular lion always kept his mornings to himself, and it was still an hour before lunch-time when he had sent off this package to Ida. He glanced quickly at his engagement-book, and, having verified his occupations for the day, went into the passage of the small flat he had just moved into in Davies Street, and called for Mohammed, or rather clapped his hands for him, Arab fashion.

Mohammed still retained outwardly the picturesque garments of Luxor, making the necessary additions to suit himself to the colder climate below the vision of the eye, and was constantly filled with the child-like vanity of his race when he saw, as he walked the streets, the attention he received from the glances of passers-by. He had already constructed in his busy brain a hundred London adventures, of which the faintest adumbration had never actually occurred, to rouse the envy of the donkey-boys when he should again go back to Luxor. But of Luxor there had hitherto been no mention, and, indeed, Mohammed was very well satisfied with London and with the good English money which was weekly his. Furthermore, to rebel against the dispositions of his effendi, even to imagine or desire them different, was scarcely conceivable even in thought. He came at once to Henderson's call out of his little room close by the door of the flat, brown-faced, white-toothed, scarlet in fez and gold-embroidered, the best patch of colour in all London, perhaps, on this dripping, dun-hued morning.

"I shall want you to-night, Mohammed," said his master in Arabic. "There will be a sitting to-night, and an effendi will be here who will come in a spirit of doubt and disbelief. So rest this afternoon, my lad, and be—and be fresh for to-night. I particularly want to have a good sitting."

Mohammed came a step closer, and his smile faded from his face; his colour also seemed to fade a little. He looked rather frightened.

"You will not raise him again?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"We will see who comes."

Mohammed shook his head, drawing in his breath with a sudden hiss.

"He will come," he said. "He is always at hand. And he is getting angry: his fingers and his eyes starve for something, I know not what; he smiles terribly."

Henderson became suddenly very alert.

"How do you know?" he asked. "Have you ever seen It clearly when you are in trance?"

"No; but I am sure he is strong and angry. I know he smiles and wants: it is in my bones, I think, that I feel it. What if he should break loose?"

Then his absolute dependence on Henderson reasserted itself.

"But the effendi knows," he said.

Henderson laughed.

"Yes, he does," he said. "And he knows that It is powerless unless he gave the word. Which word," he added, "he will not give. Besides, you are always in the circle, where It cannot come. You have my leave to go, Mohammed."

Henderson dined that night with Leonard Compton, whom he had first met at Mrs. Desmond's. Though there was nothing really approaching friendship between the two men, each found the other absorbingly interesting. Their intercourse was as if each read a new book, which neither really approved, but which neither could put down or close, and in a very short space of time they had formed the habit of seeing much of each other. Leonard, on his side, had never come across so clear-headed and acute a man, who, to his thinking, was so childishly superstitious, so utterly convinced of the most patently impossible phenomena, while Henderson, also recognising Compton's cleverness, was astounded to find one so intuitive, so utterly unable to accept phenomena which to himself were as patently true as sunrise or the setting of the moon, and as natural as either. Thus,

the upshot of incessant argument and constant disagreement had been that they were to dine quietly together at Leonard's club, and afterwards Henderson would give the other, if all went favourably, some example and instance of what he so unreasonably denied the possibility of. In other words, they would go back to Davies Street after dinner, and Mohammed's mediumistic powers would be tested. The discussion of this formed the staple of their dinner-table talk.

"But I premise this," Henderson was saying, "that the conditions are not favourable. You will, of course, impose all possible tests; Mohammed will simply laugh in your face, by the way, if you search him and tie his hands and knees, which I beg you will do, for my sake, if not for your own, for I want your distrust to express itself as practically as possible. But the spirit in which you apply these tests will certainly be inimical to manifestations. But you can't help that, and, anyhow, we will see."

Leonard laughed.

"That describes my attitude of mind exactly," he said; "I am absolutely inimical to manifestations."

Henderson frowned.

"That is an unreasonable attitude," he said. "One should never be inimical to what one has not experienced. Besides, if you are right, and this is all moonshine, there is nothing to be inimical to, whereas if it is not all moonshine, but fact, your enmity is futile. It is no good being angry with a phenomenon. Again, the fact that you detected fraud at Lower Tooting, or wherever it was, has nothing to do with the whole question. I might as well condemn the practice of surgery altogether, because I once broke my little finger and an ignorant practitioner set it badly. That says nothing against the principle of bone-setting, any more than, if I do a sum wrong, that invalidates the principles of mathematics."

Leonard considered this.

"Quite reasonable," he said. "What attitude do you want me to adopt, then?"

"I don't want you to adopt any attitude: it is just there that you make your mistake. If you can trust your ears and your eyes, I want you merely to come in order to hear and

see. Just be wide-awake, just be an observer, and do not say to yourself, 'I expect fraud.'"

"Ah, that is beyond the mark," remonstrated the other.

"Yes, I hope it is. I should not have said that, and in any case I do not mean it. I only ask you, then, to keep your judgment, your conclusions, in abeyance. Look and listen. Criticize afterwards."

"And what shall I look at?" asked Leonard.

"There you go again! I have told you that I have no idea: I am always impressing the same thing on Mohammed. It seems to me to largely invalidate what occurs if, when he goes into trance, he is vividly expecting any particular manifestation. For instance, to-day—but that will seem to you nonsense."

"Pray tell me," said Leonard. "But are you drinking no wine?"

"No, I never do before a séance," said Henderson.

"Well, if you want to know my nonsense, it is this: Mohammed has got into his head that a certain appearance that has occurred somewhat frequently in my sittings with him is angry. How he has got that notion I don't quite know, because the trance is very deep—you shall see for yourself—and one would naturally suppose he was absolutely unconscious. Perhaps, however, one never is that quite. And it was only this morning that I had to reassure him. We are running no risks whatever."

Leonard's extremely placid face was evidence that he, at any rate, was satisfied as to this. He did not look in the least like a man who thought he was going to run any risks whatever. Then suddenly Henderson faced him.

"Have you ever noticed, even for a moment," he asked, "anything queer, out of the way, in Miss Ida?"

Here Leonard was on his own ground, but a perfectly undefinable sense of uneasiness seized him as the question was asked.

"Why do you ask me that?" he said.

"Ah, then, pray don't tell me," said the other with admirable manners.

Then with the instantaneousness of thought, to which lightning is a laggard, his own private musings one night passed through Leonard's mind. He remembered with marked vividness that he had put Henderson in the "adven-

turer" class, and a moment's honesty with himself was sufficient to show him that ever since, in spite of his interest in him, that perfectly groundless suspicion, or so it appeared now, had coloured his view of him. He had always viewed him, so to speak, through rather jaundiced spectacles. It was time, at any rate, to get rid of them.

"No, I will tell you, my dear fellow," he said. "But first I must make a preface of confession. I heard about your return from the Zaffiri from that pompous ass, if I may be allowed the expression, Sir James Denton, and I pictured you as something of an adventurer. I believe I was utterly wrong, and I apologize for the thought that I have never given utterance to till now."

Henderson laughed.

"I accept it," he said. "Our excellent Sir James gives the tinge of charlatanism to all he touches. He is so exceedingly unreal himself, which may account for it."

"Unreal?" said Leonard. "Why, surely he is the most obvious plain person——"

"That is just what I mean," said Henderson quietly. "Surely, to anyone who thinks, obvious phenomena like tables and chairs or Sir James are so unimportant as to be almost phantasies. One does not, I mean, devote serious thought to them or consider them as much mattering."

This thoroughly appealed to the other man: it was an ingenious and a rather subtle point of view.

"Absolutely true," he said. "Really, Henderson, I agree so fundamentally with you over many things that I am only afraid this séance may disturb the concord. And why you asked just now what you did ask does not matter. It does not concern me, and so I will tell you, without even wanting to know your reason. Yes, I once saw something strange about Miss Ida. I saw fear incarnate sitting in her face."

Henderson did not look up, but merely raised his eyebrows a fraction.

"Did she squint?" he asked.

"Yes, horribly. Why do you suggest that?"

"It occurred to me as a possibility. You saw it once only?"

"Yes, only once, and I don't suppose I ever shall again. She seems to me to have entered a new life since——"

He paused, remembering that Ida's engagement was not

yet absolutely public property, the prey of strangers or even acquaintances. He had mentioned it, it is true, at the Arnolds' table, but he believed it had not yet appeared in the newspapers.

"Since?" suggested Henderson.

"Since when I saw that look," said Leonard rather adroitly. "All this winter she has seemed to me a radiance almost more than a girl. She has now, at any rate, a sort of aura—you believe in auras, I fancy—an aura of happiness that almost gilds her surroundings. I was conscious of that especially the first evening I met you, when we dined with Mrs. Desmond. It seemed to me as if then the sun had finally dispersed the last ragged edges of cloud, and shone from a clear ether."

Henderson had taken a cigarette, and quenched the match with which he had lit it on his dessert-plate. He knew well enough how black a cloud had disappeared that day from Ida's sky.

"I hope to go down there next week," he remarked casually.

"You knew them in Egypt?"

"Yes; I was there when Sir Henry died."

Leonard played with grape-stem and cigarette-ash a moment.

"What did he die of?" he asked.

"Syncope, following on a very bad attack of malaria," said Henderson, without the slightest hesitation, but with perfect truth.

This had led the conversation back to ordinary topics of interest, and it was without violent transition that they rose. Davies Street was close at hand, and the two walked there together. A cold wind had dried up the greasiness of the morning, and the streets were clean and gas-lit, a perfect embodiment of prosaic modern life with its many conveniences and its few mysteries.

Henderson's sitting-room, where the séance was to take place, was a pleasant oblong room looking out close to the corner where Davies Street is crossed by Grosvenor Street. Mohammed, according to orders, was sitting there when they came in, curled up in a window-seat, waiting for them, and rose at their entrance. A couple of clusters of elec-

tric light already illuminated the room, and Henderson turned up a third, so that the place was brilliant and shadowless.

"Now, pray examine everything," he said to Leonard, "not for your sake, but for mine."

Leonard took him at his word, as he was meant to do. A door communicated with Henderson's bedroom: he locked it from the other side, putting the key in his pocket. A couple of tables, one already cleared, at which they were going to sit, a piano, half a dozen chairs, and a sofa, formed the principal furniture of the room itself. Round this table there was drawn on the carpet a white chalk line, making a circle within which chairs were placed. Curious cabalistic symbols were also chalked at intervals round it. Then he bolted the windows, locked the door into the passage, and, half laughing, peeped into the piano.

"That is all," he said.

Henderson had taken an easy-chair by the fire, and was smoking placidly till the examination was over, scarcely even troubling to look at what Leonard was doing. But when he said this he spoke a few words in Arabic to Mohammed, who came into the middle of the room, and stood there waiting.

"Please examine him, too," said his master.

"It is quite unnecessary," said Leonard.

But at a sign from Henderson, Mohammed took off his gold-embroidered gabardine and handed it to Leonard, standing meantime under the full blaze of the electric light, dressed only in a close-fitting suit of Jaeger wool. And of his own accord he held out his arms widespread, and Leonard passed his hands down the slim body. Then he felt the sash and the gabardine, feeling, indeed, himself that all his precautions were perfectly unnecessary, handed them back to their owner, and Mohammed, with the same quiet air of dignified amusement, put them on again.

"Sit by the table, Mohammed," said Henderson.

Then, already feeling rather ashamed of himself, yet knowing that to act as if he was suspicious was, on the whole, fairest play to his host, Leonard took the bale of tape that Henderson gave him, tied Mohammed's knees together, tied his wrists together also, and tied him below the shoulders to the chair, making his knots with care, since, if the

thing was to be done, it had better be done well. Henderson meantime looked on, still quietly smiling.

"Make certain," he said. "We shall have no light except the flicker of the fire. And when you are certain, please examine me also. Shall I strip?"

"My dear fellow," said Leonard, "just come and sit at the table. You are laughing at me, and, indeed, I am half laughing at myself."

But this Henderson refused to do, and, taking off his coat, stood with arms wide just as Mohammed had done. There was a watch in his waistcoat pocket, the bulge of a latchkey in one trouser pocket, and a few coins in the other. Then, when he had satisfied himself that Leonard was satisfied, he sat down by Mohammed, after turning out two of the three clusters of electric light. The third was controlled by a movable switch on the table, so that it could be manipulated without anybody moving. Leonard sat down in the third chair. Then Henderson said something in Arabic, and Mohammed fixed his eyes on him. Wider and blacker they grew, and a little shiver after a few moments passed through him, and his breathing quickened. Then the eyes grew dull again, half closed, and with a tremor of eyelids shut altogether. His head fell on to his shoulder, and his breathing became normal again. A minute or two passed thus, and every moment his sleep and quiescence seemed to grow deeper.

"May I touch him?" asked Leonard.

"By all means."

Then the doctor was alert. He raised a closed eyelid, and saw that the signs of unsensitiveness were there; he held the pulse for a minute, and found that it beat only at forty-six; his breathing was so gradual and slow that any but a practitioner might have thought it had stopped altogether. Henderson waited till he had finished his examination.

"If you are satisfied, put out the lights," he said. "The switch is by you."

The switch clicked, and only the faintest gleam of firelight cast irregular and winking patches of illumination on the room. The windows had been closed, and the hum of London was faint and distant. Then suddenly, after but a minute's pause, a violent tapping sounded, and the table rocked underneath their hands which were laid on it.

Half an hour later the room was light again, Mohammed moved wearily in his chair, still confined by the tapes, and at Henderson's request Leonard first examined and then cut them. Then Henderson hit the boy lightly on the back of the hands, and Mohammed started up.

"Good-night, Mohammed," said his master; "you have leave to go;" and sleepily the boy stumbled from the room. At the door, however, he paused.

"He is angry still," he said—"angry and smiling terribly. Good-night, effendi both."

For a space the two sat silent. Then Leonard leaned over the table, starting violently for a moment as it creaked with his weight.

"What does it all mean?" he rapped out.

Henderson lit a cigarette before replying, blew out the match, and threw it into the grate.

"Have you got no explanation?" he asked. "It is for you to explain."

Leonard got up in great agitation, and though it was a cold night, he wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"You know I have none," he said. "And I don't like it. There is something quite horrible about it, not the least like Birdie."

Henderson spoke to him gently and soothingly.

"Yes, yes, just this moment you are like a child in the dark," he said. "You will get accustomed to it. There is nothing to fear in the dark really. There are just the same things in the dark as in the light, only sometimes one sees them better in the dark."

Leonard did not answer at once. Then he came and stood in front of Henderson.

"And the fear that sat on Miss Ida's face," he said. "Am I right in connecting it, though I don't know how, with what I have seen? Is it that—that Presence she was afraid of? I don't know why that occurs to me, though."

"Yes, you are quite right, but you will never see that fear on her face again," said Henderson. "By the way, there was a very interesting thing that occurred. I wonder if you noticed it. I was told I had a deadly and powerful enemy at Ryssop."

"Yes; what did that mean? I remember your translating that to me at least."

Henderson laughed.

"It meant Abdul," he said. "That man sees red when he sees me. I am sure he thinks me the very worst kind of devil."

"Why?"

"Because he is an ignorant amateur," said Henderson, with rather unusual heat, "and calls those manifestations which are beyond him Black Magic. Set-nekht, for instance, the gentleman we have just seen, is completely beyond him."

Leonard was silent a moment.

"He is beyond me, too," he said.





THIRTEENTH

THE same day that had been so gloomy and bitterly fog-ridden in London was a bath of windless winter sun in the country, and the small but very intimate party down at Ryssop spent it in various outdoor ways, in accordance with their individual tastes. Jack Carbery had been absent all day since an early and solitary breakfast—he perhaps had not quite followed his real inclinations—for he had been shooting with a friend a mile or two from Mrs. Desmond's, and when he got back about half-past five he found that the others—Ida particularly—were at tea. He himself, however, went straight to his room to change and have a bath, meaning not to go to the drawing-room, but to seek Ida afterwards in her own rooms. These operations he accomplished with the perfect acme of punctuality, and in point of fact met her on her way upstairs. She had missed him a good deal all day, and though it was she who had urged him to take the day's shooting which had offered itself, with truly feminine inconsistency she had felt rather hurt when he had done so. Such an attitude may be unreasonable, but it is so common that it has to be reckoned with. Also this was his last day here, another cause for discontent.

"Ah, you are back," she said, a little hint of this appearing in her tone. "What did you kill?"

"Very little, you will be glad to learn," said he. "I was just coming to your room."

Ida looked up at the clock.

"Well, for ten minutes," she said. "I have things to do to-night."

He followed her, the deep content of his face a little diminished; and closed the door.

"But I haven't seen you all day," he said. "Literally, I have not set eyes on you since yesterday evening."

It seemed to Ida quite impossible to let this pass unchallenged. Men were so dreadfully unfair.

"Dear Jack," she said, "it really is not my fault if you prefer to absent yourself all day. At least, you can hardly complain of not having seen me."

Jack did not regard this as the least serious.

"Oh, but I do complain," he said. "You wanted me to go and shoot. I really would much sooner have not. So do let me stop this evening, and not turn me out at six. I hate 'six': it is always associated in my mind with going away."

"Ah, I am afraid I must," said Ida.

Jack made an appeal.

"I go away to-morrow," he said. "Can't you wait till I've gone? Only just this one day, dear."

Now, Ida was a perfectly charming girl, and therefore it was necessary that she had certain human failings. In her present mood, what she would have called the mere desire for fair-play was one of them. To desire fair-play for others is probably always admirable: it is perhaps a little less admirable when one claims it one's self.

"No, dear, I can't," she said with remarkable decision, "and really, Jack, I thought we settled all that long ago. I told you that I always must have this hour to myself. I offered to admit you, you know, to teach you, but you refused. And surely you said you would give me absolute freedom in this. Just now I claim the fulfilment of your promise."

Jack was still unalarmed: he did not in the least realize how much in earnest Ida was.

"I know, but do make an exception this once, Ida," he said. "It is my last night, and I've got so much to say."

Ida's sense of the absence of fair-play grew more acute.

"Ah, you are not at all fair," she said. "I always—Come in," she broke off to say, as a tap came at the door.

Abdul entered and stood at the door.

"It is six," he said.

Ida looked from one to the other. Then, "In ten minutes, Abdul," she said.

The Arab went out without a word, closing the door behind him, and the others were for the first time a little ill at ease with each other.

"So that is your engagement," said Jack very unwisely.

Ida's eyes flashed at this.

"I don't like reminding you of your promise, Jack," she said; "which I have already done once. And I like less that it should be necessary."

Then suddenly, woman-like, she melted altogether, sprang up out of her chair, and encircled his arm with hers.

"Ah, Jack, you very tiresome boy," she said. "Why don't you box my ears for saying such a thing? Dear, don't let us ever make-believe that the faintest shadow can come between us. For it can't: we both know that. So why should we pretend anything so silly? It is the merest waste of time and of joy. So shall we beg each other's pardons, or dismiss the whole thing?"

He was far too deeply in love with her, far too generous in himself, to resist this or harbour the slightest reservation.

"I am a filthy pig," he said. "That is the end of it, just as it was the beginning of it and the middle."

He looked at her a moment in silence, as she still clung to him.

"And I'm not going to keep Abdul waiting even ten minutes," he said. "I am going at once."

Ida gave him a quick little trembling kiss.

"Ah, the man I love spoke there," she said, "and I won't spoil it by asking you to stop. It was perfect. Oh, Jack, you are so—so me," she cried.

So their reconciliation for a difference that had scarcely really arisen was effected, and each thought that, small though it was, it would but prove to bring them even closer together. But it is questionable whether such a poetical result is ever practically possible. A misunderstanding, though ever so small, must hurt, and though the subsequent reconciliation may assuage the pain altogether, yet the hurt has been there, and the place may be touched again, and be more sensitive, wincing instinctively since it has been hurt before. In his heart of hearts Jack Carbery knew that, had it been possible, he would have wished Ida never again to touch even with the tip of the most outlying tentacle of thought that land of things occult where so much of her life was passed. Frankly, he did not like it, and though his avowal that their disagreement was all over was a statement as essentially true as he could make it, it was beyond human power not to be aware that for this next hour, not he, but

Abdul, was closeted with the beloved, and it was beyond human power not to wish that things had been otherwise. In fact, as he sat in the smoking-room ruminating over the fire, he wished that they had been otherwise very much indeed.

Jack was leaving early the next morning, and, as he had hoped, Ida stole downstairs before the general breakfast-hour to sit with him and pour out his tea. All the shadow of the evening before had passed from her; she was, as Leonard had said, more a radiance than a girl.

"Men are so stupid," she said, "that I felt sure you would not be able even to make tea fit to drink by yourself. That was why I came down, not to see you, so don't flatter yourself. O Jack, let's pretend it is yesterday, and so you needn't go till to-morrow. Isn't that possible? No? When will you be down again? Let me think of that instead."

"Next Saturday, please," said he, with great promptitude.

"But I thought you were going to your mother's next Saturday? Surely you told her so, did you not?"

"I would sooner come here," said he.

Ida poured out his tea and handed it to him.

"No, go as you have planned," she said. "You see, she is so fond of you. And a mother is a most excellent relation."

"She will understand," said Jack.

"Yes, because she is such a darling. But she will be disappointed, and, oh, Jack, it is such a dreadful thing to disappoint people. I hate seeing smiles fade, when one might have let them not fade. They are like flowers. One ought to water them always very carefully, and keep slugs from them. It is a sort of murder, and a mean sort, to kill a smile."

A brilliant idea struck Jack.

"Come with me," he said.

Ida looked up.

"Ah, perhaps I might. I should love it. Jack, how brilliant of you! and why on earth didn't you think of it before? How stupid of you!"

A servant came in with letters. For Jack there was nothing, for Ida a big blue envelope containing some thick package, registered. Now, no one can resist opening a registered letter immediately: there is no situation in the

world which would possibly justify delay in so doing. Consequently, when Jack said, "Ah, do come!" she returned no answer, because the registered letter was being opened.

"What can it be?" she said, half to herself. "Oh——"

She drew out the manuscript of Henderson's lecture, and the note which accompanied it.

"You never attend to me for two minutes together," remarked Jack.

Ida was turning over the pages, written in an exquisitely neat hand, so that whole sentences could be read with a single glance.

"Ah, that is good of him," she exclaimed.

"Who? what?" asked Jack.

She had opened at random the sheets, which were clipped together at the top left-hand corner, towards the end of the lecture, and sentence after sentence arrested her. She pushed away the plate that was in front of her, still without answering Jack's monosyllabic questions, laid the manuscript down, and in a moment got completely absorbed in it. For a couple of minutes, perhaps, she remained thus, riveted by each sentence, until she reached the end. The note that accompanied the manuscript was disclosed by this turning of the last page. She broke it open, for it was in a separate envelope, and glanced through it.

"Oh, Jack, I can't come next Saturday," she said. "You see, we asked Mr. Henderson to come here any time before the end of the month, and he thinks he can come at the end of this week. Well, having said that any time would do, we can't put him off. It wouldn't be polite, and"—she paused a moment—"I know him so little, you see."

"Is that from him?" asked Jack.

"Yes, and he has sent me his first lecture in manuscript. That is so kind of him. Have I been rude reading it, and not attending? I am so sorry, but it really interested me. You know, the other day you opened a wedding-present, and did not answer six consecutive questions from me."

Jack continued his breakfast in silence for a minute or two, seeing out of the corner of his eye that Ida was furtively turning over the pages again. What she had just said was true: he remembered the incident perfectly, and changed the subject.

"Well, I shall go to my mother's the week after next," he

said, "and come here for next Saturday till Monday, if I may."

Ida dropped the sheets: she dropped them somewhat obviously, as if with an effort.

"No, don't do that," she said quickly. "It really will be better to stick to your original plan. Besides, we are up in London for two nights this week: you will see plenty of me," she added, half laughing.

Now, Jack was neither exacting nor suspicious, but it seemed to him quite clear that the grounds on which Ida wished him to keep to his original arrangement had shifted. Nor was it unreasonable that he should determine whether this was so.

"Why don't you want me to come next Sunday?" he asked.

Ida looked up again from the manuscript she was still glancing at. She knew she was not a good hand at telling lies; she told the truth much better and so told it.

"Because Mr. Henderson is coming," she said frankly. "He is intimately connected with that part of my life with which you have decided to have nothing to do. I don't think you would get on well together. It would be rather difficult. That is why. There are evidently"—and she just touched with her finger the manuscript he had sent her—"there are evidently a good many things which I wish to talk over with him. So come when he is not here, Jack. I think it will be better so. I am sure it will."

Once again, as last night, the smarting place was touched; yesterday's reconciliation, though complete in itself, had not wholly healed it, for this time it hurt rather more. Yet the great sweetness of his nature and his absolute devotion to her made it easy for him to prevent any hint of that being reflected in his answer, and he forebore to go back on the subject.

"All right, then," he said cheerfully, "and you will be up in town for two nights this week. Thursday I dine at Berkeley Square, Friday you and Mrs. Desmond dine with me and we go to the play. That is splendid, Ida. And there's my carriage; I must go."

She got up also. But as she got up she gathered Henderson's manuscript to her with a careful hand. Yet only Jack

was for the moment in her mind: her hand's action had been automatic.

"Ah, my dearest," she said, "I hate your going. But after March there will be no more going for either of us. Thursday, then, is it not? And it's good-bye till then. Oh, Jack!"

She put her face up to his: the radiance had returned to it.

"I feel such a brute," said he, "when I ask you 'Why?' and again 'Why?' But my excuse is such a good one, Ida."

"What is it?" she asked, knowing well.

"Because you are you," he said, kissing her.

She came with him to the door; the sun was still a golden ball not far above the horizon, shining through the dispersing mists. There had been frost in the night, and all the grass was a network of white fairy-like spikes infinitely delicate. The morning smelled cool and clean, as if all the world had had a cold bath during the night, and the sun, now risen, was the brisk rough towel that followed. Then at the door a more public hand-shake passed between them, and he drove off.

Where the drive turned before passing out of sight, he looked back as the motor crunched the half-frozen gravel. She was still at the door, waiting for the final sight of him, and in answer to his waved hand she waved back with the sheaf of manuscript. Then the carriage, still sounding crisply on the frozen gravel, passed out of sight.

Ida turned into the house again with a sigh: the line she had taken both the evening before with regard to her hour of meditation, and this morning with regard to Henderson's visit, was perfectly deliberate on her part, and dictated to her by a voice as clear and inflexible as that of duty. Deeply and unreservedly as she loved Jack, so that he seemed to her to be the summing-up of all earthly love, she had no intention, nor even, indeed, any temptation to give up that separate life, which was to be secret by his own choice from him. Indeed, there was no possibility of it: she might as well, for his sake, have said she would give up the air she breathed, without which she would have been stifled, however genuine her sacrifice. But it troubled her that there

should have been ever so little a ruffling of the peace-pool, which she knew had happened. Yet in that it was better that there should be a little ruffling now than a storm hereafter, she was willing to accept the present little evil in order to be secure from a future greater one. Jack saw now, which perhaps he had not seen before, not fully grasped at least, how serious and vital to her own life was this life into which he had refused to penetrate, how utterly impossible it was that her rights, her own course of action on this plane, could be infringed or interfered with. And certainly he had responded with the most absolute generosity; friction on such things was impossible in the future; they understood one another: the mere words of agreement had become pledges.

She had taken a cup of tea and a piece of toast as she ministered to his breakfasting, and, not wanting more, she determined not to appear at the table when the rest of the party came down. And though she quite sufficiently accounted to herself for her prospective absence by this fact of her fast already broken, she knew that a more potent reason lurked in her mind, for she was longing for an hour to herself in which to read through the lecture Henderson had sent her. The glances she had cast between half-turned leaves at any rate had convinced her that she was very much concerned in what he had to say. So she went up to her room again telling her maid that she was not to be disturbed for an hour.

The fire had been already lit in her sitting-room, and she drew a chair up close to it, feeling suddenly rather languid and rather cold. She had got up earlier than usual, and had been awakened, as she now remembered, from a very deep sleep by her maid for the early breakfast she had already eaten: also Jack had gone, and these were all causes that might tend to dispiritedness. True, when she woke she had found herself in the very highlands of serenity and *joie de vivre*, but these, as if they had been cloud only, not warm sunny earth, had dispersed and vanished, just as the tracery of hoar-frost was vanishing now outside under the genial heat of the broad winter sun; and while she sat warming her hands before beginning her reading, she groped backwards through her memory to find any reasonable cause for this sudden sinking of the spiritual barometer. She had slept

very heavily without dreaming, but before that, before that, just as she went to sleep. . . . Surely there was something, something that had mingled with sleep, but was previous to her deep dreamlessness, something that must have been coincident with the séance—though she knew not of its existence—in Davies Street last night. There had been some sense that, though danger did not threaten her, yet danger, angry danger, poised and evilly smiling, and seeking to strike, had been abroad during the earlier hours of the night. What was it?

These were unprofitable musings, and drawing her chair so that the light of this lusty sun fell on the pages, she began to read Henderson's lecture very carefully and attentively. The exquisite neat handwriting was as authoritative as print, and the arguments were as clear and as neat as the handwriting. The writer, she felt, was no stumbler through mists; he made no surmises as to the way to follow; as long as the tracks were there he traced them; when they ceased he said, "They have ceased; let us see if there is another way. There must be a way, because there must be a way: we have got to find it."

Long before she got to the end she was entirely absorbed: it seemed to her as if a new day was breaking. Step by step he climbed up a stair as secure as a rock-hewn fortress, basing his conclusions, not on possibilities, but on data that were incontrovertible. He never hazarded a guess: he eliminated all the false, and what was left had to be the true; it could not be anything else. And when the last page was turned, she sat with a kindled eye gazing into the fire. The new day dazzled her, and it disclosed horizon after horizon hitherto unseen and un conjectured.

Again she turned to the manuscript.

"It is in our fear that danger lies; to be afraid of anything invests that thing with a danger that does not of itself belong to it and gives stability to a baseless fabric, or, anyhow, a fabric that is based only on our fear. . . . It is not possible that evil should touch any who inquires, seeking good, else we must assert that evil is the stronger and will conquer good, which is unthinkable. . . . By what semblance of reason can we say that to render the spirit of one who has gone before audible, is right; to wish to render it visible implies a want of faith. . . . It is only to the evil

generation that no sign is given; to the faithful the signs are manifest, the cloud of witnesses is waiting for communion. They leap for it like starving men."

Ida let the manuscript fall forward again on her knee, and waited, her hands on her lap, in that intense expectant state of silence (but ready to receive any guidance), that she practised every day of her life. In these protracted alienations from the material world she remained very still, for the awakening of the inner sense seemed to demand utter quiescence of the body, and she only, as far as intention went, laid her soul open, as one may lay a book open and let the wind turn to any page it wills. She quenched, too, all conscious thought, making of herself a pool that should just reflect the sky. This she did now: as she read she had "thought her fill," the harvest of thought was gathered and garnered, the work of the mind was over; it was for the Spirit of God, if He so inscrutably willed it, to move over the face of the waters, to breathe life into the image of clay that the mind had made.

But this morning quiescence of brain seemed to be denied her: like a telegraph-needle in a thunderstorm, she was twitched backwards and forwards by words and images outside her own control. At one moment there would flash across her eye, like the flight of a rocket, the horseshoe lake at Karnak, with the walls of the temple of Mut half disinterred, and waiting for some hand to restore life to the mutilated and time-worn statues that stood therein, to the hideous apes and the expectant cats: again her ear was quickened, and she heard the sobbing h-sh-sh of the palm-trees in the garden at Luxor, when Sirocco began to make trouble in them. Then again the vivid brown face of Henderson was before her, saying, so that she almost heard the words, "You are safe," but even while he spoke another voice more familiar said, "Evil is approaching," and as it spoke the stirring of the palm-leaves waxed louder; they sighed and moaned and waved their fan-like fronds. Again Abdul's face seemed to watch her, full of love, full of helpless pity, full of the agony caused by something that, though not yet here, was surely coming.

Here the vague inward pictures paused in their self-presentation, and that state of half-trance with which she was so familiar in her meditations began to glow like sun-

set or sunrise within her. Bodily sensation faded, and was almost gone, when suddenly close to her, so she thought—so close that she almost felt the breath of the speaker on her cheek—there came a voice, whether really audible to her ear or only to her brain she could not tell. It was there, anyhow: she had full consciousness of it.

“Be not afraid,” it said.

But the voice was not her father’s but Henderson’s, and with a sudden start her mind went back to a previous thought. What had preceded her deep and dreamless sleep?

She sprang out of her chair, and the manuscript fell rustling to the ground. On the mantelpiece stood a photograph of her lover, and she took it up and kissed it. A sudden terrible sense of being unprotected, at the mercy of dreadful forces, for the moment seized her.

“Oh, Jack, keep me safe!” she said to herself.

But the panic was but momentary, and she picked Henderson’s lecture up, smoothed its crumpled edges, laid it carefully in a drawer of which she turned the key, and sat down to write an answer to his letter.

Henderson duly appeared at Ryssop for the week-end. He had been warned by Ida that they were alone, she and Mrs. Desmond, but he did not appear to think that sort of solitude a reason for excusing himself, though a choice of dates had been offered him. He had, in fact, chosen the days on which they would be alone in preference to those on which “a few people” would be with them. And certainly at dinner on Saturday night he made himself charming, talking of multitudinous subjects, without a hint of the overfed lion suggesting itself: he was perfectly modest and natural and brief. He spoke even with a certain shrewd amusement of the lionizing to which he was being subjected, and a lion who can laugh at lionizing is probably a far from objectionable animal.

“It is very odd,” he said, “but whenever anybody does anything that stirs, however slightly, the popular imagination, everyone always wants him to eat and drink too much. I assure you enormous luncheons and dinners have been provided for me. But I really did not go to the Zaffiri oasis with that object.”

This was a subject on which Mrs. Desmond had before now spoken to Ida.

"Ah, hospitality may be a savage virtue," she said, "but I think it is quite certainly a virtue. I like the instinct that says 'Come to dinner,' and gives you a good one; the words are symbolic of the good-fellowship, the kindness, that prompts them, and so is the dinner. Besides, however much you are interested in a man's achievements, you cannot ask him to come in the middle of the afternoon and talk. He is going to provide you with mental food: the least you can do is to sustain his corporeal energies."

"The jolly roast beef of old England," remarked Ida in rather a detached voice. She, too, remembered the arguments that had passed between herself and her aunt.

"Yes, dear, and potatoes, and every delicacy of the season," said Mrs. Desmond, with a tinge of acerbity.

Ida laughed.

"Dear aunt," she said, "I believe you would feel a touch of pleasure in seeing a drunken man reel about, if you knew he had got drunk at your expense. You would say, 'Anyhow, it was my whisky.'"

Mrs. Desmond did not deny this, but went on:

"I love all the good-fellowship implied in giving people food and drink, things they assuredly want, and would have to get for themselves if they were not given to them. I like the little holiday, though it is only an hour long, which one gets if one dines out; it all predisposes to friendliness, to taking an interest in the interests of other people, to jollity, to talking instead of thinking, to smiling instead of frowning, to being gregarious, not solitary."

"Yes, that is all true," said Henderson, "and your view is kind and human. But it strikes a man, who has been all his life a good deal alone, as odd that just because he has been to the Zaffiri oasis people should quite suddenly open all their champagne for him."

There was some slight pathos in this, unmeant probably, as all true pathos is, which touched Mrs. Desmond.

"Ah, don't be alone, Mr. Henderson," she said. "Loneliness is a very bad habit. You should break yourself of it, or, rather, get somebody to break you of it. I assure you I am right."

Henderson looked up, and saw that Ida was waiting for his reply.

"I don't know about that," he said. "Unless I could be alone a good deal, I feel as if I should shrivel up below, till I was like a dry orange, peel only, with nothing inside."

Ida beat the tips of her fingers gently together, in dumb show of applause. She, too, was an apostle of loneliness.

"An ally!" she said. "Assault the position, Mr. Henderson. My corpses and Aunt Julia's lie thick on the field."

"No corpse of mine lies thick anywhere," said Mrs. Desmond genially. "That is only Ida's way of saying that we often argue on this point, and that I invariably rout her. I assure you I am not a corpse. Look at me: am I?"

Ida looked up again and nodded to her ally. The talk had somehow deepened, and Mrs. Desmond, since no one said she was a corpse, spoke again, and quite seriously.

"I do not believe solitude is healthy," she said, "and as for your simile of the dry orange, Mr. Henderson, why, loneliness is exactly what produces that dryness within; it is the converse, the association, the fellowship with others, that makes one's fruit ripe to the core and full of juice; one ripens inwards, not outwards. I don't say that in certain natures other things—music, nature, art—may not to a large extent take the place of people; my point is that one should constantly be absorbed in things external to one. One's soul has to go out of doors to get the sun, to get the rain, to get anything that happens to be going, and all that is going is good. What do you say to that?"

Dinner was over, but Mrs. Desmond showed no sign of moving: Ida, too, as if she had been planted like a tree by the water-side, was leaning forward with both arms on the table in an attitude of complete permanence.

"I say this: that if one is to take life seriously," said he, "all external things are distractions. The well of truth, of reality, is within one. One has to search for the living water there, not outside one's self."

Again the talk deepened.

"He went about doing good," said Mrs. Desmond.

"But in preparation He went for forty days into the wilderness," replied the other.

"Ah, yes, yes," said Ida softly. "It is that—it is just that."

Again Henderson looked up across the table at the girl, as she sat there intent and exquisite. And at the sight the subject they were discussing suddenly sounded hollow and unreal to him; it was a mere mouthing of words, and she, her beauty, the flame of his longing for her, was the only reality, the only thing that burned. Surely that must kindle her, too: the whole force and will and strength of his nature dragged her to him: power like this could not be ineffectual nor miss its aim; force like his could not be expended in nothing, in a mere beating of the air. And Mrs. Desmond saw the appeal in his face, and was sorry for him. She felt sure that before long he would speak to Ida, and the knowledge that all this love must go hungry and unsatisfied seemed to her very sad. It was likely to make him more lonely than before, and loneliness she would always pity; even the wandering Cain seemed to her worthy of commiseration. But in spite of her pity she was extremely glad that Ida's affections were already so devotedly engaged. Henderson interested her: she found him quick, clever, pleasant, interesting. But deep down she was not quite sure she liked him; deeper down yet, and quite incomprehensibly, she was quite sure she did not trust him. Why, she did not quite know; the reason lay deeper than the workaday plane of thought and motive. Consequently, as often as her distrust of him was present to her mind she banished it, since she could not justify it, and called it a baseless suspicion. And this she did now.

He had been in the house nearly twenty-four hours before Ida had an opportunity of speaking in private to him, for the next morning they had all gone to church, and after lunch strolled together in the bright brief afternoon sunshine. After that, however, Mrs. Desmond had gone to her room to write letters, and Ida, lingering behind her a moment, asked him if he was at leisure.

He, too, had been waiting with more impatience than she for the opportunity, and in answer to her invitation he followed her upstairs to her sitting-room. She took his manuscript from the locked drawer where she had deposited it for safe-keeping, and gave it to him.

"I think it is wonderful," she said; "it has cleared up many doubts for me. And you are so right in what you say

about fear. It is that which above all stands between one and the clear vision. But how is one to get rid of it?"

"By acting as if one was not afraid," said he, "by doing the thing one fears until fear vanishes. Besides, whatever it is you want, you are the person in the world who should be least afraid. Surely you, above all others, have seen in your own person a most striking demonstration of the baselessness of fear. Who for the last six months and more could have had more awful, more valid reasons for terror? Yet what is left now? Not the shadow of a shadow."

Ida's hands trembled a little as she sat down again.

"Yes, there is still the shadow of a shadow," she said; "for the evil, from which at present I am safe, exists still; it has been loosed. It is in the world again: one cannot get over that. There is an evil influence the more, potent again for evil. And also—also my father talked to me the other day, and said that evil was approaching."

Henderson nodded.

"Yes, you told me," he said, and paused. "And have you thought over what I suggested to you then?" he asked.

"That he wants to be in closer communication with me?" she asked. "Yes, I have thought of it constantly."

She got up and came a step towards him, and her mind, which had so long been wavering, was suddenly made up.

"Will you help me in that, too?" she asked.

His moment had come, not for the wealth of the world could he have held back the question now. He rose, too, and stood opposite her.

"Give me the right to help you now and always," he said very low—"the right to shield you from all evil, to love you——"

She suddenly put her hand out, as if to defend herself from a blow.

"Oh, it is impossible," she said,— "it is quite impossible. I am sorry."

But the whole man was on fire. Even this for the moment was nothing to him.

"There is nothing impossible!" he cried. "Even from you I will not take that answer. I love you so that you must love me: I exercise the conquering right of love, which is stronger than death. Don't you remember the amulet? Why, Ida, it is this that it meant. This is the

laying of the ghost again. Until love is stronger than death, so it said, it will never be laid. But now it ceases."

The girl looked up at him with wide pitying eyes.

"Ah, that cannot be it," she said. "What the amulet meant I cannot tell you, but I know for certain that it did not mean that. That is quite, quite impossible."

But her voice faltered: there had been hideous confirmation of the truth of the amulet already; its breakage had set free a spirit, there was a dreadful fitness in the laying of that same spirit by the love of the man who had burst its ceremonies.

"Your voice quivered when you said that," said Henderson, with a sudden relentlessness, pointing his finger at her. "I tell you, this must be true. Impossible? Everything else is impossible. I who freed that dark soul bind it again. It is loose: my love is stronger than death, and bids death take back its dead."

Ida had grown suddenly very pale: his force terrified and appalled her. It was as if some great engine of frightful power was whirling its wheels within an inch of her.

"It cannot mean that," she said again. Then she pulled herself together, recognising his right to know.

"I am engaged to be married," she said. "I am going to be married in April to Mr. Carbery."

Then the essential man showed himself, brutal and masterful, and cruel in his love.

"You can't, you daren't," he said. "You simply daren't!"

Ida saw how utterly his passion had mastered him, and the resentment that rose in her at this threat, this unparalleled impertinence, was quenched by pity. Also she owed him a deep debt of gratitude, and she held out her hand to him.

"Ah, that is unsaid. You did not mean that," she said to him. "You did not say it."

That gentleness, that instant forgetting and forgiving of his intolerable speech, with its awful veiled threat, could not but appeal to all that was best in him, and there was in him something which was better and finer than the spirit which had shown itself in his last words.

"I beg your pardon," he said simply. "I do not think I knew what I was saying. It is generous of you to wipe that out."

Then he made a great effort with himself.

"I hope you will be very happy," he said.

She looked at him, with her hand still in his.

"Thank you very much," she said simply. "And once more, I am very sorry."

Henderson turned away, and fingered the ornaments on the mantelpiece a moment.

"I have a great favour to ask," he said at length.

"Yes?"

"All I have said is true," he said. "Will you still let me help you where I can help you?"

"But how willingly and how gratefully!" said she.

He looked at her with a certain pathos.

"And you won't be afraid of me?" he asked. "I don't think I could bear that."

"No, I won't be afraid of you," she said.

It said worlds for Henderson's tact and self-control that half an hour later, when the three met at tea, his manner was absolutely natural, and it never entered, however, remotely, into Mrs. Desmond's mind—though she was naturally quick to perceive such things—that the scene between him and Ida, which she had put down as being inevitable, had already taken place. Ida herself was also equally inscrutable to her aunt's eye: she was, it is true, rather silent, but that was not uncommon with her; also, she did not stay very long at tea, but left them. That, again, was more than natural, for she always retired to her own room at this time for her hour of concentration. And used as she was to the occurrence of this phenomenon—for it happened daily with a punctuality that was not particularly observable in the rest of Ida's performance of the little events of the social round—Mrs. Desmond never quite succeeded in not being irritated at it, or at any rate in not having to suppress irritation when it occurred. It was so utterly opposed to her gospel of the sociability of the human race. To-day, however, she did not quarrel with it, for she was not averse to having a talk to Mr. Henderson alone, and did not let Ida's exit cause a pause in her conversation, which, in a few well-chosen sentences, she whistled home from gardening to the subject she wanted to talk about.

"Yes, I find that Mrs. Caroline Maguire requires so much

cutting back," she said—the rose-stalk was getting really advanced, for Henderson seemed to understand roses, just as he seemed to understand most things—"and when you do get it to bloom, I don't know that it is so much better than *Beauté inconstante*. One often spends an absurd amount of time over a mere curiosity. Curiosity is almost always unremunerative. But I suppose we are all curious. We all want to know about things that we cannot positively find out."

This separated their talk from garden affairs with some completeness: it amounted to a divorce. As such, anyhow, Henderson took it.

"Yet, after all," said he, "everyone who is worth his salt spends his whole energies on what is difficult of attainment. Your cultivation of Mrs.—Mrs. Caroline Maguire is a case in point. As a gardener, you wanted to grow what was difficult. And whatever our line is, we want to attain, not the obvious, but the obscure. We can leave the obvious alone: it attains itself. It is only to the obscure that we devote our attention."

"We do," said she, "and we make a mistake. Now let us dismiss the subject of roses. Take our lives—the actions that make our lives and the motives that make our actions. Can anything be finer than the life of a man who is honest, who does his work, and tries generally to be good in all perfectly obvious ways?"

Henderson sat silent a moment.

"Mrs. Desmond," he said at length, "you don't really think that, or else you must give a very wide interpretation to the phrase 'his work.' I imagine you don't approve of my work, which is the study of occult things. I don't suppose you even approve of Miss Ida's solitary hours. But what if that is her work? Supposing her mission, the design of her life, is to do just that."

Here was the point.

"I hate those solitary hours," she said. "Ida has to live the life of a girl and of a woman in the world. That, anyhow, is quite certain. She is——"

Henderson interrupted here: this bore so directly on the scene he had just had with Ida that he felt he must tell Mrs. Desmond. She must know soon, and it was a thing better not put off.

"She is engaged to be married," said Henderson.

Mrs. Desmond looked at him in surprise.

"How did you know?" she asked.

"She told me this afternoon."

"À propos de——?" she asked.

"À propos of me. I asked her to marry me. She refused me, and said why."

Now, Mrs. Desmond did not like him, she did not even trust him, but she was sorry. Love gone wrong was always a waste.

"You are behaving very well," she said. "I had not the slightest idea that this had happened."

"It is always a mistake to behave badly," he said. "And the merest worm can always behave passably. It is a conspicuous worm if it does not," he added.

Mrs. Desmond had been taken completely by surprise: she had been on the look-out for it, too, yet in no detail had his subsequent behaviour strayed from the normal.

"I never guessed what had happened," she repeated.

"No, why should you? Nothing that can happen to one can touch one's self-control," he said. "That, anyhow, we must keep impervious to the rains of circumstance."

For the moment Mrs. Desmond entirely forgot her instinctive dislike of him. He was so very interesting, a large merit in her eyes.

"That is a very big saying," she said. "Most people have not that self-control. Where did you find it?"

"In being alone," said he, "in getting away from distraction."

"In what Ida is doing?" she asked.

"In what she is capable of doing," he said. "But even in delving into one's self, which sounds a simple process, one sometimes wants help. You may dig, but you want some sort of person with a wheelbarrow to take away what you excavate. At least, the work goes quicker so."

"Abdul, you mean," said Mrs. Desmond.

"No; I don't think Abdul can help her," said Henderson. "I believe, in fact, that he hinders her."

"I wish you would tell her that!"

"I will," said he. "That seems to me a very good suggestion."



FOURTEENTH

MRS. DESMOND and Ida left Ryssop about a fortnight after Henderson's visit, and before the end of January were radically installed again in the house in Berkeley Square. It was not Mrs. Desmond's general custom to move up to town so soon, but, as usual, she could have supplied you with thoroughly excellent reasons for anything that she did, and this cold and foggy weather, in which for days together the birches and larches of the forest were a shower-bath of wet ready to be discharged at any moment by a puff of wind—in which, too, outdoor life in the country was frankly impossible—made this early move to London a most rational manœuvre. It was, in fact, a cold, leaden January, a succession of days in which it is wise to give up Nature as a bad job, and use to the full the aids and artifices of civilization. Again, as often happened, solid grounds, though secret, backed her ostensible and valid reasons, since, for various causes, she was anxious to get Ida again into a *milieu* which was fuller of distraction and external avocations than was the country in this abominable season. For Ida was, as she would have phrased it with regard to one of the beloved roses, not doing very well. She was not budding; she did show the rightful promise of spring that was certainly hers.

Here Mrs. Desmond, if she followed, as she had many times done, the track of her thoughts, which was well beaten and distinct up to this point, strayed as in a country of sand-dunes and dubious paths in various directions. Sometimes a very simple explanation of the girl's dispiritedness occurred to her. Ida, accustomed as she was to the bright winters of the South, missed the sun and all his golden benefits, but as she showed an obvious reluctance to go to the Riviera or to Egypt for February, a plan that Mrs. Desmond had more than once proposed, it seemed to her aunt

only right to try the effect of mental sunshine in the form of that stimulus which London so invariably gives to those who are drooping a little in the country. Yet the explanation that she missed the sun did not altogether satisfy Mrs. Desmond, and here she tried another route in this shifting sand of uncertainty. But it was difficult to know which way to go: Jack Carbery had been down again, and Ida seemed to be as completely satisfied about the future she had chosen as ever. They were quite clearly very much in love with each other; there was no cloud there: no man's hand came out of the remote horizon of the sea. Then, perhaps, for a little she would wonder whether the simplest explanation of all—namely, that Ida was physically a little out of sorts—was not the true cause. Yet it was impossible to imagine a picture of more perfect health, and there was no way out here. So again she tried a new route: were these inexplicable and uncomfortable hours of meditation in any way responsible for the girl's listlessness and want of spirit? This, too, ended in an *impasse*, for Mrs. Desmond was bound to confess that it was only after her solitary hour that Ida returned to anything like her autumn serenity. So, the girl hailing the idea of London with alacrity, to London they went, without further delay, leaving the cold gloom of the country for the cheery, gas-lit streets, full of the tonic of people and close human companionship. "No more occult trouble here," thought Mrs. Desmond to herself, as she pulled up the window of the brougham that met them at Victoria.

Henderson's first lecture, the one which Ida had had the privilege of reading in manuscript, took place some two or three afternoons after they had installed themselves, and the effect of it on that set in London among whom Ida chiefly lived—a set who were in the worldly sense exteriorly smart, but beneath whose fashionable hats there were busy, inquiring brains—was extraordinary. It seemed, indeed, as they met at lunch and tea and dinner next day that Henderson was just the prophet for whom they waited, and he came as punctually to their needs as the sun when night is over. He was not clerical—he proposed to them no giving up of the world to which they all indubitably belonged; he had no difficult and impracticable doctrines to urge on them about the universal brotherhood of man, or the duty of clasping

by the hand perfectly impossible specimens of brothers. The intellectual, the artistic tastes, indeed, which most of them possessed, or at any rate professed or sympathized with, he urged them to cultivate to the full; but he spoke of other powers which they certainly all had, limitless tracts of their souls which were not yet brought under cultivation, where the soil would bear flowers strange and beautiful beyond all imagining. Above all, he urged them to root out fear from their minds—both fear of inquiry and investigation and fear of consequences.

No doubt his personality, the force which quite certainly emanated from him with a strength which even the dullest could perceive, the magnetic power that he gave to what he said, had much to do with the impression he made. Also he had real eloquence: his delivery was the delivery of an orator, a man in whose brain thought is clear and definite, and in whose mouth those thoughts are made clear and definite also; his sentences were sharp-edged and transparent—thought crystallized. His address lasted something over an hour, and during the whole of it he had not once looked at his sheaf of manuscript, which he held in his right hand tightly rolled up. A long pause succeeded his final words about fear, but none moved, for all felt that there was just one word more coming. Then it came.

“For fear, such fear as that of which I have been speaking, is the darkness within us that we need to be enlightened,” he said, looking straight at Ida, who with Mrs. Desmond was sitting a row or two from him. “That is the fog of our own making, through which, as long as our will does not banish it, the sun cannot shine. It is we who have to will it away: and we have to see to it that our mind never again gives off these damp exhalations, as it were, of cowardice. So be not afraid. That is my final word to you.”

Again he paused, and his voice changed from low, vibrating tones, which were yet audible to the most distant of his listeners, to the timbre of ordinary speech.

“I shall hope to address you next week,” he said, “on a few further points connected with my subject to-day, and we will then pass on to the various modes of communication with those who have passed over, by means of mediums.

The books which you may find it useful to read, if you have leisure between now and then, I have made a list of, and have pinned up on the door for any who may care to copy them."

He bowed and left the platform, and in the closely-filled hall began the rustling of his moving audience. There was no attempt at applause—the clapping of hands would have been a discordant note—and hardly the sound even of conversation. In silence certainly Mrs. Desmond went out, followed by Ida, and not until they had both got into the electric brougham which waited for them did she speak.

"Well, my dear," she said at length, "I think your Mr. Henderson is a very remarkable man, and I don't mind confessing that what he said about solitary meditation moved me very much. It sounded true: one felt it must be true. Fear, too. Yes, he is quite right there—a fog of our own making. Fear is just that—what was it? a damp exhalation from our own minds."

Ida looked at her aunt almost imploringly. Her soul had come to a parting of the ways, and was in an agony of doubt.

"Ah, is he right?" she said. "May I take it as quite, quite certain he is right? Is it not possible that our fear is a sort of warning, a danger-signal put up by God? It seems to me he may have overlooked that possibility. What if it is the sign-post to warn us off dangerous places?"

Mrs. Desmond was really too much absorbed in the memory of the address to notice the strange entreaty in the girl's voice.

"No. I felt he could not be wrong about that," she said; "it was convincingly true. Given that our whole purpose, as far as we know, is good, given our purpose is in harmony with our best self—that is what he said—no fear respecting it can be anything but childish and cowardly. And I hate cowards," she added on her own account; "there is no tendency so inexcusable, no crime so unpardonable. I respect a murderer far more than a coward, and as for a burglar, he is really a romantic and splendid character in comparison."

Ida took one of the two roads, took it with a wrench and an effort.

"Then, I will be a coward no longer," said she to herself; "I won't be afraid."

But Mrs. Desmond heard.

"Ah, my dear, that is a good resolve," said she, "whether your cowardice concerns that life of yours which I know or that of which I know nothing. Banish it in any case from both: it can do you nothing but good if you manage that. It was worth our while to go to hear Mr. Henderson, if he has done that for you."

Ida gave a long sigh.

"Yes, he has done that," she said.

It so happened that next day Jack Carbery came at a rather late tea-time to Mrs. Desmond's house. It was already, he knew, after half-past five, and at six Ida would be sure to go upstairs to her own room, where Abdul was alone admitted. The thought of this still put out thorns in his mind—a growth which he felt himself unable to check, though, to do him only the barest justice, he always, so to speak, picked off those thorns as soon as he felt their pricking; in other words, he never let himself consciously dwell on the thought. In any case, however, he had still twenty minutes in which to see Ida—he had only seen her once before that day, which was really dreadful—and tell her the arrangements he had made for the evening, when they were going to the play together.

As he hoped, he found that when he arrived she had already left the drawing-room, and he went straight up, according to custom, if she was not downstairs, into the outer sitting-room next the sanctum, which, like Aunt Julia, he had never entered. She was sitting with her foot on the fender, for the evening was chilly, and sprang up with a delicious cry of welcome when he entered.

"Ah, Jack, how charming!" she said; "I was vaguely hoping you might possibly come in for a few minutes. But it was getting so—so near six that I was almost giving you up."

He sat down on the arm of her chair.

"Vaguely?" he said. "I don't quite like that. Besides, you must never give me up."

"Only vaguely, because the possibility was so remote. And the rest of what you said is even more absurd. How silly you are!"

"I know I am," said he. "You must teach me to be wise."

"Ah, if only anyone could teach anyone else that! Wisdom is priced above rubies, and I don't wonder. Not that rubies are not dears," she added, touching a little ruby charm he had sent her only the day before.

"Do you really like it?" he asked.

"Oh, Jack, you are silly again! If I am to teach you to be wise, I see I must begin at the very beginning: you don't know even the alphabet yet. Why, if you had sent me just a heart-shaped piece of paper I should have loved it. And that reminds me," she said, laying her hand on his—"you won't mind me saying it, will you? But, Jack, I have so much, I am so rich in—in that which you have to spend—stupid gold, I mean—when you give me dear things like this. So remember, won't you? that it is the fact that you think of me which is to me above price, like wisdom, the best wisdom."

She stroked his knee gently a moment.

"So if you send me," she went on, "just a line saying, 'I saw a diamond tiara at Streeter's this morning, and wanted to give it you,' that is just the same to me as if you had given it me. Your thought has given it me. It is the thought I value: the thing itself is only a symbol of the thought."

There was something exquisitely delicate to his mind about this, for though the subject had never been remotely mentioned between them, yet their disparity in the point of this world's wealth had often been in his mind, and she had divined and healed this. He took the hand that caressed his knee and kissed it.

"I want to give you the earth and the heavens," he said, "and I can only give you love."

Again she fulfilled his thought, flying to it like steel filings to a magnet.

"And that is the best of all," she said; "for, indeed, Jack, there is nothing else that I want."

She clung close to him a moment, more intimately than ever before.

"To think that your love has come to me!" she said. "Why? why?"

"Could it possibly have been otherwise?" he asked.

A smile of extraordinary happiness lengthened and uncurled the beautiful curve of her lips.

"No, not possibly," she said. "What nonsense!"

Faint and far-away to her at that moment was all else, that life in which he had no part, all that was symbolized to her in her solitary meditations. Could this moment have been lengthened out, just as it was, to the end of her life, she would never have tired of it. Never before had the human relationship, the absorption of self in another, been so consummate to her. And had he at this moment asked her to give up all her life that was secret from him, to lead with him but the simple, human, loving life, free from all that was to him fantastic and even dangerous, yet that was to her so intensely real, it is probable she would have consented, and perhaps might never have regretted her yielding or wished to recall her consent. But he was in honour bound not to interfere with that, not to raise a meddling finger in its direction, and was silent.

Then this perfect chord of passion, certain but unfulfilled, resolved itself, and by gradations they descended to the affairs of the day. Henderson's lecture was mentioned; their plans for the evening were on the tapis when the clock on her mantelpiece chimed six. At that he rose.

"I must go now," he said, taking the initiative on himself. "I have—" and his voice faltered almost into a laugh—"I have things to do. I am always very busy at six in the evening, Ida, and you must not ask me to wait."

She appreciated that, and laughed also.

"You absolute angel!" she said. "And it is quite true: I know you have, and I will not even wish to keep you. Is not that generous of me? So go away."

A footman at this moment entered.

"Mr. Henderson wants to know if you will see him, Miss," he said.

Ida's smile faded; a look of intense and concentrated thought took its place.

"Yes; ask him to come up," she said.

Then she turned to her lover.

"I trust you, dear, as utterly as that," she said.

It was a moment before her meaning dawned on him, before he understood that, while he was being sent away and Henderson received in his stead, she knew that the absolute liberty which he had given her with regard to her inner life would not now be infringed by him even in thought. This

was her secret hour, and whether she passed it alone, or with Abdul, or with Henderson, or with whomsoever she chose, was as little his affair as what was going on in the house opposite. Yet, generous as he was, and utterly as he had intended, and intended still, that she should take him at his word in this, it was scarcely humanly possible that he should not be conscious of a taste of bitterness. But as far as was humanly possible he let no hint of this appear.

"Thank you, dear," he said simply. "I will not abuse your trust. I will go, then, and I shall be back at a quarter to eight for dinner."

At this moment Henderson's step sounded on the threshold, and the two men—the one coming in, the other going out—met at the door. And Jack did not fail in completeness even when he was to leave them together, but held out his hand to the other with perfect frankness. He did not think he could quite manage a smile, and so did not attempt to nail one unwillingly to his face.

"Good-evening," he said. "I am just off. May I congratulate you on the great success of your lecture? Ida can talk of nothing else, nor Mrs. Desmond. At a quarter to eight, then, Ida!"

It was not until he had got out into the square again that he knew what an immense effort that moment of decent behaviour had been to him, yet even then he was more than half disposed to blame himself for finding that any effort at all had been necessary. But as he crossed the square he looked back at the house, and saw at this moment the curtain being drawn in Ida's room, where she was alone with Henderson. And at that his effort to be decent, as he would have put it, was no longer of any avail; he raged inwardly, and something as bitter and black as jealousy shot up in his heart. It had been bad enough before to know that he himself was sent away, while Abdul was admitted to be alone with her in that little inner room in which he himself had never set foot; but Jack could scarcely have loved her as hungrily and wholly as he did if he had not stormed within himself at the thought of Henderson also sharing her consecrated hour. What on earth did it all mean, this shutting of herself up, not alone, for that would have seemed to him, somehow, a beautiful and a suitable thing, but now with a mysterious Arab, now with a scarcely less mysterious travel-

ler, who took her voyaging in regions more dark than the heart of the desert from which he had just returned? Then, with a renewed effort, he pulled his runaway thoughts up on their haunches, for he saw suddenly the signpost, so to speak, past which they were bolting, and on it was written "Jealousy." And to allow himself to pursue that road implied uglier things than he cared to think about. But to turn and whip them back again was no easy thing.

Ida meantime had established Henderson in a chair. The meeting of him and Jack at the door had a little disconcerted her, for she had not expected he would be so terribly punctual. But she did not in the least blame herself for not having told her lover whom she had asked to come and see her. By his consent this was her own hour.

"And first of all I want to thank you for yesterday," she said. "You helped me immensely. You gave me help of which I stood terribly in need: I did not know how much I needed it till you pointed it out to us all."

He did not affect not to know what she meant, for he had spoken very directly to her out of all the audience, using, too, the words she had told him she had just heard in séance from her father's spirit.

"I am more glad that I can tell you," he said. "And you have determined to be afraid no longer?"

"Yes; I have been afraid too long," she said. "Indeed, a minute is too long to be afraid."

She sat down opposite him.

"So I ask you to help me not to be afraid," she said, "and to help me to go further—further than Abdul would wish me to go. I feel that I have stuck, if you know what I mean: I am not progressing."

"Ah, there is a difficulty, then, about Abdul?" said Henderson.

"There would be if he knew; but I do not intend he shall know, until I can prove to him that his fears about certain things—all that he classes, in fact, as being Black Magic—are groundless."

She shivered for a moment, drawing a little closer to the fire.

"When I think of all I have needlessly suffered since last March," she said, "I am ashamed. I was afraid where no

fear was. A dreadful spirit was loose, but as you tell me, and as I believe, it is powerless; it cannot conceivably hurt me."

"Not conceivably."

Ida got up and began walking quietly to and fro.

"Now, I owe a great deal to Abdul," she said. "I owe him a debt for his love and his care and his teaching which I can never repay. But I must go further: I must get into closer relations with my father. As you once said, perhaps he needs me, perhaps he is longing for a closer intercourse. And I long for it, too, and you have convinced me that, since there is nothing wrong, as I used to think, in the longing, there can be nothing wrong in the fulfilment of it. I ask you to help me to get it."

Henderson suddenly felt a secret pang of intimate delight at the way things were going. To say that he wrote his lecture with the sole object of bringing himself into closer relations with Ida would be beyond the mark, but it is not overstating the case to say that this purpose lay behind every line he wrote. She was truly sorry for him at the answer she had been obliged to make when he offered her his love, but she was deeply grateful to him for what he had already done for her, and in this pursuit of occult things she now asked him to help her further. She treated him as a friend, for a girl like her could never ask a favour from one she did not regard in this light. He knew, also, how vital a part of her life was the study of things unseen, and that her lover had no part in that, and therefore could fill at the most only half her life. And into the other half she already beckoned himself: it would be strange if he could not make himself as essential to her there as was the need of water or air to her corporeal existence. Already, too, as he had seen, his words and his thoughts had weight with her: he inspired her, inspired, too, the more spiritual part of her nature, and she asked him to minister to her spiritual needs. And at these thoughts his eye kindled as he looked at her, and his love for her—for love it was, though springing originally from the mere desire of annexation—suddenly thrilled and sang aloud in him.

She saw that, and took a step back from him, and with the quickness and intuition that were his, he read that involuntary recoil, slight as it was, aright, and almost by a

stroke of genius, bold, hazardous even, but supreme in its success, turned the dry rock of her shrinking into a fresh spring of pity.

"And you must not be afraid of me, either," he said, "for I will do my best always, and I assure you I have a certain amount of self-control to serve you—how shall I say it?—quite impersonally. Only if, as just now, you see that to serve you is the greatest happiness that can now befall me, if for a moment I cannot help letting you see that, you must bear with it, and try not to mind it. I know myself pretty well, and you need not fear that you will often have to bear that: it will never come to words even. I shall never make any appeal."

Ida was a great deal moved; his behaviour was so exquisitely thought out that it had the authentic ring of spontaneousness; the art was so flawless that it appeared to be perfectly natural.

"Ah, Mr. Henderson," she said, "I am so sorry—I am so truly sorry."

"Thank you," said he.

He paused a moment, and decided quickly and rightly not to thrum the string of pity any more.

"And now about Abdul," he said. "It will, I suppose, be difficult for me to give you séances here, since you wish, and I think quite rightly, to keep him ignorant of what you are going to do."

Ida suddenly clasped her hands. Though for the last four-and-twenty hours her decision had really been made, still, it was momentous, and she was now taking the plunge.

"I wonder if I am doing right," she exclaimed.

Again Henderson took his cue with absolute precision. It would never do to urge her.

"That you must decide entirely for yourself," he said.

"Shall I tell him that I am going farther than he cares to lead me?" she asked. "'Going,' he will say, 'in another direction?'"

Henderson considered this.

"I will tell you exactly what I think," he said. "It is this: I do not think we ought ever to put obstacles in the way of our convictions. Your conviction is that it is right for you to go forward. Personally, then, I should not tell him: he will, no doubt, try to dissuade you; he may even

unsettle the conviction which you solemnly believe to be right. You tell me so, at least."

Ida was silent a moment.

"Yes, I do," she said. "Well?"

"As you know," said he, "I am going to give a series of séances. Will you come to them? You will see things there, I hope, that go further than Abdul cares to lead you."

She shook her head.

"I can't," she said. "It seems to me so dreadful, when my father is what he is to me, to sit round with other people who could hear what we said to each other. Or if he appeared, that others, strangers, should see him. I could not talk to him with a room full of people."

She paused, but Henderson made no answer, for from the tactical point of view it was so infinitely better that the suggestion which might be made should be made by her, not him. Then she raised her eyes and looked at him.

"Is it too much to ask you if you would give me a private séance now and then?" she said. "No foolish ideas about what is conventionally possible or what is not seem to me to matter in the least when we are both seekers, both in earnest, and when we both desire nothing but to go further in these things."

Henderson could hardly help giving a little sigh of satisfaction. He had scarcely dared to hope that things would go as smoothly as this.

"That is the plan I should have proposed myself if I had ventured to do so," he said; "I am very glad you suggested it. I quite agree with you about the—well, almost the indecency of seeing those whom one has loved, or even hearing them, in the presence of strangers. And, as you say, what does convention matter?"

His tone was completely frank; there was absolutely no *au-dessous* that could be detected, nor, even had there been, was Ida inclined to be on a detective errand. And she went on quite simply, but her simplicity, had Mrs. Desmond heard it, would have made her think that those long autumn visits had been, as far as effect went, thrown into the sea. She might as well have taken a cottage in the country and lived there alone with Abdul. All the natural unconventionality of woman and man before the spoiled life of cities and communities had interfered with it was there. In front of her

real needs, her real life, all considerations of other kinds, all sidelights, all the unimportant things which are nevertheless necessary to life as it has to be lived, vanished. And Henderson knew that; no one was quicker at the exigencies and proprieties than he, yet he, to further his own case, allowed her to propose what he knew he had no business to permit. But he was not the sort of man who lets scruples on account of others interfere with his own designs.

"So I will come to your flat," she said, "for that is the simplest plan, if you will be so kind as to give me some séances there, just you and your medium—Mohammed, is he not?—who was there in the temple."

She stopped a moment, some sudden back-wash of recollected horror just touching her. Then for a second Mrs. Desmond would have not wholly despaired.

"Perhaps my aunt had better come with me," she said. "Yet I am doubtful, even after your lecture, if I could persuade her to. May I bring Beatrice Montague? Have you met her? She is a great friend of mine."

Again the very archfiend of ingenuity whispered in Henderson's ears.

"By all means," he said cordially. "Bring her, by all means. Is she in sympathy with you? I only ask for information. I don't think I have had the pleasure of meeting Miss—Miss Montague."

This had exactly the effect he anticipated. She could not, in fact, do other than reply in the way he wished.

"You mean that the presence of anybody not sympathetic is likely to interfere with the completeness of what we attain?" asked Ida.

Henderson laughed, perfectly naturally.

"You know the séance as well as I," he said, "and how the presence of unsympathetic people always interferes with its success. I'm afraid I can't remedy that. But we will do our best. Pray come, then, with Miss Montague. When may I expect you?"

Ida's mind had already changed; and though there was no hint in Henderson's tone that he thought her scruple weak or unworthy, she looked her own concession to conventionality in the face and condemned it. She and he, as he had said, were both seekers after truth; their private position had been explained between them, and did not enter at all

into the question of the séance. Furthermore, she trusted him.

"I am stupid," she said. "I will come alone. Let it be soon. I know you are very much occupied, but whenever you are free for an hour that will suit me."

Again a perfectly matter-of-fact manner served him best.

"To-morrow, then," he said. "I shall be free, since you consult my convenience, which I really do not want you to do, at four."

"Four, then," she said. "And, Mr. Henderson, one thing more. You have brought Mohammed over here; it is an expense. Pray let me share it. In fact, I must. I am going to take advantage, thanks to your kindness, of your outlay. Please promise me to charge me the fair amount. You must let me pay, in fact, what you would naturally receive from a séance at which four or six, or whatever your usual number is, were present."

He hesitated a moment, quite honestly, and his answer was honest.

"I don't think I can," he said.

"Please. For indeed I can take advantage of your kindness on no other terms. Besides, it is only reasonable."

"Yes, then," he said. "And, do you know, it cost me something to promise you that. I don't like taking money from you."

"I am sorry. But I feel sure about it. For on my side I should be receiving yours if I did not pay."

Henderson got up.

"You want now to be alone," he said, "and I will go. I shall expect you to-morrow at four, with Mrs. Desmond or with Miss Montague, or with anyone you choose to bring, or alone. In any case, you will come, and give me the very great pleasure of being of some service to you. Good-bye."

Henderson walked quickly back the two or three hundred yards that lay between this house and his flat in Davies Street, paused for a moment at a telegraph-office to excuse himself on the plea of ill-health from a dinner invitation that evening, and then, shutting himself into his bedroom, lay down on his bed and thought. He felt he could not possibly go and chatter at a crowd, for, though he had very fair control over himself, he felt it altogether beyond him to make

his mind go scouring over the topics of a dinner-table when it was filled to overflowing with just one thing, which he must think solely about. Thought with him was no vague and dreamy musing over the past, nor as regards the future any fabricless cloud-building, which a puff of air might shatter or upset; his thought was firm in construction, and his plans and projections for the future were based solidly on the foundation of the past and the data of the present. He did not believe in accident or coincidences, scarcely even in luck. What happened in this world, he put it, was due to definite causes which might or might not be in his control. With those that were not in his control he had nothing to do, and he did not waste a moment's thought over them: with those that were in his control, however, he had everything to do: the responsibility for the effects that could be produced with them was his—they were reliable tools if only he used them properly. And his thoughts now were very busy with the uses to which he could put them. But these uses seemed to require a great deal of contemplation.

But lying there with hands clasped behind his head and eyes fixed unseeing on the ceiling, his firm, well-constructed building rose with surprising speed. Firm was the foundation of it—namely, his knowledge of the tremendous reality to Ida of the spiritual, the occult part of her life: on that he felt he could safely build, and no superstructure based on that could totter or tumble. She stifled without it; even the dim shade in which, according to his view, she was still groping, led by the purblind Abdul, was to her the sun and air and wine of her existence. That there were perhaps brightnesses and glories transcending these twilights, even as the noonday outshines the faint filtering of stars through night-mists, she had begun to guess, and she had come to him to lead her out into the clearer light, to be the disperser of shadows and her guide into the day. And if her twilight was so real and essential to her, how vital, how commensurate with life itself, would be the brighter places into which he believed he could take her! And—here he began to build—just as nothing in life could be so real to her as that which he would show her, so no one in life could be more real to her than himself.

So far he was building firmly: then for a moment, since his whole being and all that he knew of love desired her so

passionately—for a moment he let his thoughts flame high. However real her love for Jack Carbery was, she must know soon how he missed completeness, how he missed everything that her soul really valued. It was less than half a life that was the most she could share with him: it was hollow—without inwardness, just the ordinary human intercourse with the fine, simple fellow whom everybody liked. That could not be her future. It was for him, Henderson, to teach her that, not showing that he taught her, but making her draw the lesson for herself. Indeed, she could not help drawing it; the fact would grow gradually closer and closer to her till she could not avoid seeing it.

Then his thoughts dropped down again; dropped, indeed, to a very low level—one, in fact, that is only justified by that mean and grovelling proverb that says that in love all is fair. He would detach her, then, from Carbery by making himself essential to herself; and he would also detach Carbery from her. That was easy; it was as easy as lying—indeed, it rather resembled lying and other things of that nature. Ida would come here to-morrow, and he thought the chances were that she would come alone. It would be his fault if she did not come again and again. It would be his fault, too, if Jack, gradually, but with ever-deepening certainty, did not ponder conclusions about this. Already this afternoon he had been sent out, while Henderson was admitted, and the latter had seen very clearly that his parting cordiality was an effort to him. Next time it would be harder; the time after that it, perhaps, would be no longer possible. And here the very guilelessness of Ida helped him: she would see her lover's uneasiness, she would certainly guess its cause, and there was nothing in the world so likely to make righteous indignation red-hot as that. He himself meantime would have been making himself necessary, he might almost say, to Ida's life, so that she could no longer give up the solitary séances with him, to which Jack Carbery would so justly object. And at that moment, long delayed it might be, but certainly coming, he would offer himself to her again.

He shifted his position slightly on his bed at the conclusion of this piece of reasoning, and turned, so to speak, to ways and means. His head had got hot with thought, the blood throbbed and beat through the arteries of his temples,

and his hands and feet felt cold. But to resume. The great point for him now was to make himself essential to Ida, to establish a strong influence over her. Here his science was again ready to help him; she was going to sit with him in séance. There were a hundred ways of establishing this influence; but of all, if he could persuade her to let him hypnotize her . . .

Henderson sat up suddenly; the idea was so simple, though till that moment it had not occurred to him, so much the readiest method of gaining the influence he sought. He knew that she trusted him—her suggestion that she should come to the séances at his flat showed that;—and, as both he and she knew, communications from the spirit-world of a very intimate kind are sometimes conveyed by the medium to another in hypnotic sleep. At the same time, and most conveniently, it was by inducing the hypnotic state in her that his influence over her would be most quickly and predominatingly established.

He got up and went into his sitting-room, where, with head bent and slow, silent steps, he walked up and down, still thinking intently. His policy seemed simple, and promised success, and for that reason he went over it again minutely, considering at each step what possible failure there might be, what possible danger threatened it. True, she might refuse to be hypnotized; true, also, the whole thing might fail: he might simply not succeed in detaching her from her lover or in attaching her to himself. But it was not for this, the possible total failure, that he looked, it was for points where other agencies might intervene and rob him of what, in this fierce, savage mood that was now on him, he felt that he regarded as his prey. One such immediately occurred to him—namely, Abdul. At present, as far as he knew, Abdul shared his mistress's gratitude to him, but how would it be when Abdul found out that Ida came to him no more for instruction and for help in communicating with the beloved dead? Yes, he had to reckon with the possible enmity of Abdul. Yet how could Abdul touch him or interfere with him? By preventing Ida from coming to him? It was his business, then, to make such attempted prevention fruitless. In any case, however, it would probably be some little time before Abdul found out what was going

on: it was important, therefore, that he should establish his influence over Ida as soon as possible.

But what, again, if the whole plan failed, if he simply did not succeed in establishing an influence over her, if she did not let him hypnotize her, and while grateful for his help, yet kept him at arm's length? Was there not, then, something else, some further power to evoke, something dark and smiling and angry, as Mohammed said, which he could call to help him, and which already had established itself in the secret place of her soul? But that thought, to do him justice, but crossed his mind to be dismissed again, and he did not seriously contemplate this further possibility. Still, it had crossed his mind; he had consciously wondered, before he put it away again, if it would come to that. But his rejection of it was at present instantaneous, for in his way, according to the law and habit of his nature, he loved her, hungrily, savagely, it might be, but still he loved her. And how savage and imperious his love, if disappointed, might become he did not at present consider or calculate. He only knew that it was as strong as life, and therefore stronger than death.





FIFTEENTH

ABOUT four days after this Beatrice Montague was walking down Oxford Street with her cousin Leonard. They had met by accident at the corner by the Marble Arch, and found that they both were bound for the same destination—namely, Mrs. Desmond's house in Berkeley Square. It was a day of brilliant primrose-coloured sunshine; both evidently were intending to walk, but Leonard looked nervously round as they directed their steps eastwards.

"I hope nobody will see me," he said, "and that those who do will know I am your cousin. It is dreadfully compromising for me to be seen dangling about Oxford Street with youth and beauty instead of being glued to a microscope in a laboratory, or sitting by the bedside of suffering. So tell me if you see anyone I know, Beatrice, and kindly drop behind."

Beatrice was apparently in a not very serene temper, for she did not even smile.

"Go the other side of the street, then," she said.

Leonard looked at her quickly; it was his business to detect symptoms, and something in her tone told him that she was worried. So he dropped his little joke and spoke seriously.

"I will when you have told me what is the matter," he said.

He had apparently guessed right.

"I can't shout secrets in Oxford Street," said she.

"No, my dear cousin, don't shout them. Tell me them quietly, if you think I can be of any use. Of course, if it is private, or I can't help, we'll talk about something else."

Beatrice, as a matter of fact, had for the last two days been longing for a confidant, but had felt unable to make a start. Leonard, however, had now given her the impetus re-

quired. Things had occurred that had really rather upset her, and the feminine joy of ordering Ida's trousseau had been quite unable to cheer her up: she had gone about that entrancing business with a heavy heart which the most delicious things in silk had been powerless to lighten.

"Leonard, you are intelligent, aren't you?" she asked.

"Yes, almost oppressively so," said he.

"Well, then, exercise your intelligence. I don't know what to do, and I don't know whom to tell, or really even what to tell. I don't want to tell Mrs. Desmond, you see, because I am her friend. And yet I must tell somebody."

Leonard's oppressive intelligence easily pierced through this grammatical slip.

"Miss Ida's friend, you mean?" he asked.

"Yes, of course, I said so. But Ida really has been so odd the last few days. She has been taking the brougham and going on mysterious errands. Twice yesterday and the day before I went to see her on really important matters—dress, you understand—and both times she suddenly interrupted the most crucial conversation and said she had to go out. Naturally, I asked her where she was going. She would not tell me!"

"Is that all?" asked Leonard.

"Is that not enough? Men are different: they go to clubs or anything, and even the most secretive men will tell their friends—their intimate friends—where they are going. But with a girl! Girls don't go out on mysterious errands. They haven't got any."

Leonard had nothing at this moment to suggest, and they walked on a little way in silence.

"There is something queer about it all," continued Beatrice, finding it a relief to talk; "and I can't bear the atmosphere of queerness. It makes me jumpy and injures my digestion. Ida, too! And Abdul knows there is something queer; I can see that. Yesterday as Ida went out he was, as usual, sitting in the passage by her room, and he gave her a long look that was the most dreadful mixture of pity and entreaty and fear."

"Ask Abdul, then," said Leonard, feeling rather serious in spite of himself, for the atmosphere of "queerness" spreads in the most rapid manner.

"Ah, but he doesn't know, for he asked me this morning

where she was going every day. He wants to know himself."

"And Miss Ida?" asked Leonard. "Does she look as if she had some—some secret?"

"She is perfectly radiant," said Beatrice. "Whatever it is, it makes her extraordinarily happy. Yet somehow, though I suppose that ought to reassure me, it doesn't."

Leonard was seized with a sudden thought.

"She is very unconventional, you know," he said, "and I hazard a guess. She meets Jack somewhere, and they have nice little times. But Jack has no business to do that," he added. "All the same, I sympathize with him."

Beatrice directed a pitying gaze at her intelligent cousin. No wonder he found his intelligence oppressive, if this was a fair specimen of the fruit it bore.

"I think that is the worst guess I ever heard," she said. "Have you seen Mr. Carbery lately?"

"No, not for a week. Why?"

"Because I am sure he knows something, and won't say. He's too loyal for that. But the knowledge does not make him very happy. No, you must think of something better than that. Besides, what you suggest is so utterly uncharacteristic of Ida."

The two had passed out of Oxford Street into Davies Street. They walked quickly, for, despite the enchantment of the sun, there was still a nip in the air, reminding loiterers that summer was not yet. This street was rather empty of passengers, and the houses were sunning themselves indolently under these primrose beams of spring. Close to the corner where Grosvenor Street crosses Davies Street there was drawn up an electric brougham, which for some reason rather attracted Beatrice's attention; for though one electric brougham is very like another when seen at the distance of twenty yards, this one had something vaguely familiar about it, though exactly what suggested familiarity to her she would have found it impossible to say. But while still she idly wondered about it the door of the house opposite to where it was drawn up was opened, and a girl came quickly across the pavement, said one word to the chauffeur, and stepped in without seeing them. She, at any rate, was unmistakable to both of them.

They both stopped and looked at each other. Then, still in silence, Beatrice moved on. As they passed the house she looked up at it: there was a saddlery shop below; the windows above were large, with plate-glass in them, and without question she dismissed the saddlery shop from her thoughts, feeling certain that this meeting was the clue to her own uneasiness. Once she opened her lips to speak to her companion, but no words came. The second attempt was more successful, and the words got blurted out.

"Do you happen to know who lives there?" she asked.

Leonard struck the pavement for a stride or two with the end of his stick. It seemed to him also that the mystery of Ida's secret errands was solved beyond any question.

"Yes, it so happens that I do," he said.

Not till that moment did Beatrice know how very definite her suspicions had been.

"Tell me who it is," she said, feeling certain what the answer would be.

And the answer was exactly what she knew it must be.

They walked on again in silence. Then Beatrice spoke again with singular conviction.

"I can't bear that man," she said.

Then her voice changed. She spoke in a tone of dreadful alarm.

"And what is Ida doing there?" she asked. "Oh, I know there is something terrible coming. And it is her guilelessness, her utter trustfulness, which is so dangerous. She cannot believe that there is a heart in the world that is less white than hers. And if she knew more she would know there is not one so white."

"Yet I have seen fear in her face," said Leonard. "Now, tell me: what on earth has she to fear?"

"Mr. Henderson," said Beatrice shortly.

Then she broke out.

"It is all this dreadful spiritualistic business," she said. "I hate the very name of it. She leads an inward life of which we have no conception. Abdul shares it with her; him I trust. I hate black men, but somehow I trust him. Mr. Henderson shares it with her. Him I don't trust one inch, and I detest him. I think I have always detested him, though perhaps without knowing it. Now I know it, and

I know why, too. Ida there alone! Oh, there is some dreadful wickedness astir!"

They had come to the north end of Berkeley Square, and the well-established, prosperous-looking house, with its whitened doorstep, its shining windows, the polished brass of its knocker and door-handle, its whole air of comfortable, rather materialistic serenity, was close to them. Here Leonard paused.

"It concerns one person more than the whole of the rest of the world," he said. "She has been there alone: there is no doubt of that."

"You don't mean that you are going to tell Jack Carbery?" she asked.

Leonard's intelligent face was dark with thought.

"I think I must," he said. "As you and I know, Miss Ida is whiter than the driven snow; no man or woman could look in her face and doubt that. And the last person who could doubt it is he. But she is doing, from her very whiteness, dangerous things. To play with fire burns a baby at the breast, just as it may burn anybody else. He must see to that: he must take the baby away or take the fire away. You must see that this cannot possibly go on. Yes, I must tell him."

Beatrice turned to him quickly.

"No, you must not do that," she said.

"How not? How can I call himself my friend and not tell him?"

There was an inexorable logic about this which forced itself on her.

"Let me see Ida, then, first," said she; "let me tell her what we have seen. Perhaps—perhaps there is something we don't know."

"That, of course, is so," said he. "There must be something we don't know, some—some astounding piece of innocence on her part that allows her to go there. But I, too, have been to that house: I have seen and heard things there that I believe to be of the devil."

Beatrice looked round as if for reassurance on the roomy windy square, the utterly prosaic houses, the commonplace English ugliness of the street up which they had passed.

"Davies Street, Berkeley Square, London," she said, half to herself.

"Yes. But you are right. See Miss Ida first: tell her you think Jack ought to know. Most likely she will want to tell him herself. I am sure she will," he added.

They walked on again towards the house.

"Tell her this afternoon if you get an opportunity," he said as he rang the bell.

"Are you coming in?" she asked.

"Yes; I want to see her. That will drive the conviction home of how utterly innocent she is."

Beatrice turned from him with a gesture almost of disgust.

"Fancy wanting that!" she exclaimed.

"I don't really want it," said he. "But it would be a little more comfortable."

Certainly, whatever the cause might be, Ida this afternoon was radiant. Usually she was not very talkative, but to-day, as she welcomed her two friends, she was full of happy talk that bubbled from her lips as naturally as cool, wholesome water bubbles out of some fern-fringed hollow in rocks; and if Leonard wanted a little reassuring, the sight of her alone would have reassured the most gloomy sceptic. She had got in but a few minutes before them, and she still had on a hat that even Beatrice, who as a rule thought nothing was good enough for her, honoured with approval.

"Ah, you dears!" she said impartially, holding out a hand to each; "and have you come here together? Bee, I have done none of those things I ought to have done, because I haven't been near a dressmaker all day, when I had faithfully promised you to spend my entire time there. And I don't think I am even penitent, because I couldn't help myself. Why, there was sunshine! Who could spend a morning at a dressmaker's when the whole park was a yellow bath of it? And the snowdrops are coming up, weak little white things streaked with green. But each said that spring was coming. I listened to them for an hour, and they talked to me quite confidentially. Tea?"

"But I really don't think I have done much to-day that I ought not to have done," she went on. "That is a dangerous thing to say, is it not? My astral body may have been eating peas with a knife. But you don't believe in astral bodies, do you, Mr. Compton? How foolish of you! The

more you believe in, the more anchors you have, in case one drags."

Beatrice drew her friend a little aside, interrupting this surprising nonsense.

"Ida, you are a beast!" she said. "Here am I burning midnight oil, so to speak, on your gowns, and you don't even go to try them on!"

"Ah, that spoils them," said Ida. "I can't try on an oily gown. You must order me some new ones. So I shall get a few more holidays while they are being cut out."

"Anyhow, you shan't defend yourself by a quibble like that," said Beatrice. "The looms of London wait for you. I grant the morning to the snowdrops, but the afternoon, Ida?"

Ida's face suddenly congealed: the happiness that bubbled and overflowed from it was suddenly stricken to ice.

"I was busy this afternoon, too," she said.

"Horrors?" asked Beatrice, this being the accepted word between them for the inclusion of all that was occult.

"Yes, to be frank, horrors."

But it must be supposed that the memory of these same "horrors" was not so horrible, for again, like the sun coming out of a cloud, the former radiance was hers.

"Or you may call them happiness: they both begin with 'h,'" she said. "By the way, has not Jack come yet? I haven't seen him since—since——"

"Since this morning?" suggested Beatrice.

"No, before that—since yesterday. Oh, Bee, I know Jack has something on his mind. I wonder what it is. I feel such a brute to be so happy when there is the least cloud about. But I know he has a cloud somewhere."

"Perhaps he hasn't seen enough of you lately," suggested Beatrice. "Perhaps you have been too occupied to satisfy him."

Again there was a congelation.

"What do you mean?" asked Ida. "Yes, would you kindly shut the door, Mr. Leonard?"

Here was the opportunity, and as Leonard crossed the room, "I want to talk to you," said Beatrice. "I really have something to say—not clothes. It concerns you."

This passed almost in a whisper.

"Me—me myself?" asked Ida.

"Yes."

Ida rose; there was a fresh arrival or two to greet, for tea-time was generally populous with chance guests at Mrs. Desmond's house; but as she rose she spoke quickly over her shoulder.

"Yes, if you can wait half an hour, I will come upstairs and talk to you," she said.

Music, though of no very formal kind, was the sequel of this tea-party, and after the guests had refreshed their bodily needs in the smaller drawing-room, Mrs. Desmond, who appeared rather late, manœuvred them out into the larger to hear a pianist who happened to be among the guests. This was a suitable opportunity for Ida to make her exit with Beatrice, and as the tea-room grew clear they slipped quietly away upstairs. Ida said nothing on the way up, nor did she speak until the door of the sitting-room had closed behind them.

"Now, dear Bee, what is it?" she asked, smiling.

Beatrice hesitated a moment: before that radiant white beauty she felt as if there was something coarse even in the mere suggestion that Ida's interviews with Henderson were not, to say the least of it, wise. Yet it had to be said: it was not fair to Ida herself that she should remain ignorant of, or, if not ignorant, should without reflection disregard, so elementary a convention as that which ordains that a girl should not pay unaccompanied calls to the flat of a bachelor. Yet she hesitated.

"Oh, Ida," she said, "it is only because I am so fond of you, and because you are so unspotted by the world, that I speak to you. I hate doing it, and yet I can't help doing it; I should be wrong not to. But to-day Leonard and I saw you coming out of Mr. Henderson's flat alone; others may see you—others, perhaps, have seen you. It is impossible, that sort of thing—quite impossible."

Ida looked at her gravely for a moment; then an amused smile dawned on her face.

"Dear me! is it as bad as that?" she asked. "Have I been doing something quite awful?"

"Yes, quite," said Beatrice earnestly; "and Jack, too—"

Ida's smile of amusement died away.

"Ah, now you are talking seriously," she said. "Does Jack know, do you think, that I go there alone?"

This time it was Beatrice's turn to smile.

"How on earth could he, and not remonstrate with you?" she said. "Oh, you are such a child!"

Ida did not attend to this involuntary criticism.

"I shall certainly tell him, then," she said, "though it never occurred to me before. You see, I go to see Mr. Henderson on certain subjects which concern me very deeply, with which Jack, by his own choice, has nothing to do. But with regard to them he gave me perfect liberty of action, and he gave it, I know, with no reservation: it would be an insult to him if I supposed that."

She paused a moment.

"I am perfectly willing to tell everybody," she said. "I am not ashamed of what I am doing in the least, but to have tried to keep it secret like this—ineffectually, too—was foolish. It was stupid of me to imagine I could keep it secret. So I will tell everybody—ah, everybody but Abdul," she added.

Here was that beautiful innocence of Ida's rushing into the other impossible extreme. To "tell everybody" was as bad as doing it at all. Jack Carbery, Beatrice argued, ought to know, but it concerned nobody else in at all the same way as it concerned him. For the moment, however, she picked up the last thread.

"Why not Abdul?" she asked.

"Because I think Abdul would kill Mr. Henderson if he knew what has happened. Whatever happens, he must not know."

Ida's eyes brightened. The old radiance dawned again in them.

"I see my father now when I wish," she said. "I feel the touch of his hand and of his kiss. It is so real to me that the rest of the world, all but one thing, Jack's love, is dim and dream-like in comparison. And Abdul thinks that all that is Black Magic. He is wrong, I feel sure, but I feel equally sure that I could never convince him."

"But how? What do you mean?" asked Beatrice, with a feeling of fascinated abhorrence.

"I mean exactly what I say. Mr. Henderson hypnotizes me, and though to all appearance I look as if I was asleep,

yet it seems to me that in that state alone I am really awake. The falling asleep comes afterwards, when you would say that I awoke."

Beatrice wrung her hands in a sort of despair.

"I don't understand about these things," she said, "and you do. But do you not put yourself into his power, Ida, when you do this? That is horrible. It is out of the question: you must not."

Ida shook her head.

"Yes, I put myself in his power. Why not? He is my friend, and I owe him a debt so great that to the end of eternity I can never pay it. And never in my life have I been so happy, so near to the unseen presences."

"Ah, I don't trust him," cried Beatrice. "He must know how utterly out of the question it is that you should go to his rooms like this. Yet he permits it. That is not a manly thing to do; it is an abuse of his power. How can you trust a man who does that, or say that he is your friend?"

"Ah, that is not so," said Ida quietly, but looking very grave. "I suggested, before he ever hypnotized me, that I should go to his rooms. That was entirely my own doing."

"He should not have consented to that, either," said Beatrice. "To your innocence there was nothing wrong. But he knew——"

Ida was silent a moment.

"I must remind you that Mr. Henderson is my friend, dear Bee," she said. "He is, perhaps, the most unselfish, self-sinking friend I have ever had. You must not speak of him to me like that. And you must not again say, as you said just now, that he cannot be my friend. You do not know."

There was a short pause, and Beatrice felt that it was vain to rage against this firm, quiet gentleness of Ida's. After a moment the latter spoke again.

"I will certainly tell Jack," she said; "and I gather that you don't recommend my telling anybody else. That is the right thing to do, you think? I will send for Jack and tell him now. Or perhaps, Beatrice, if you are going downstairs, you would ask him to come up and speak to me. I want to put this right as quickly as possible."

Beatrice got up and clung to Ida a moment.

"Ah, do remember how I love you," she said—"how we all love you."

Neither Ida's smile nor her serenity deserted her as, after kissing Beatrice and seeing her go downstairs, she waited in her room for her lover. She did not in the least fear or dislike telling him: now that it had been pointed out to her that she ought to do it, it seemed to her clearly the natural thing to do. It was not long before he came, but, even as Ida had said, there was a cloud on him.

"Jack dear," she said, without introduction of any kind, "I have sent for you in order to confess to you. At least, Beatrice tells me I have a confession to make. So I have taken her word for it."

He smiled, but the smile certainly came from behind the cloud.

"How terrible!" he said. "Well?"

But suddenly Ida, who had thought this would all be so easy, so straightforward, found it hard to get on. She paused, fingering the buttons of his coat: it needed that she made a call on her courage. But of that she had plenty.

"I have to tell you that I constantly go to see Mr. Henderson," she began.

Jack withdrew a step, quite without violence, but quite unmistakably, and Ida's hand was left in mid-air.

"He comes here, I know," he said. "Do you mean that?"

Ida looked at him steadily.

"No; I go to see him, to sit with him in séance at his flat," she said. "I go alone. That is my confession."

"Then, it was you, perhaps, I saw going there two days ago," he said, "just after I had left you after lunch. I caught a glimpse of you only. I was not certain it was you, even."

He paused a moment.

"And for the last two days I have done nothing but try to persuade myself that it was not you," he said.

"Is that why you have been cloudy, gloomy, distrait?" she asked.

"I am sorry if I have appeared so. But probably that was why. Yes, certainly that was why."

Then quite suddenly each of them saw that a real disagreement was in existence between them of no ordinary

lovers'-quarrel texture, but something solid, something that their talk here and now had either to demolish or to make, so to speak, into a real barricade. And at the first moment of seeing that, Ida, as a woman, had the woman's impulse—the impulse to give way, to throw herself into his arms, to lean on his comfort and his strength. Yet in this matter there was already a compact between them: she felt that she must remind him of an existing treaty. Her liberty in these matters had been promised her, and she had no intention of giving it up. She could not, indeed, give it up: it was half her life that it implied.

"Yes, I go there," she said; "and I go there for purely psychical reasons, for reasons which entirely concern my inner life, with which you have nothing to do."

Jack shook his head.

"It is impossible to put an action like that into a box, tie it up and label it 'Psychical,'" he said with a certain quiet sternness that Ida had never seen before in him. "You are doing the most indiscreet, the most unheard-of thing, in going to his rooms. Oh, Ida, you must see that! If you must see him, you must let him come here, and there must be somebody with you. It is impossible that this should go on."

At this the first womanly impulse altogether vanished.

"I cannot be dictated to like that," she said, her hands trembling a little. "When I, as I have just told you, am dealing with affairs of mine which you do not even wish to know about, they are my concerns, and no one else's, not even yours. You wished to know nothing about them."

"I know enough about Henderson," said Jack. He could not have loved her more, but there are things which a man, especially when he is in love, cannot stand. Not reasoning, but instinct, dictated to him.

"Pray, then, what do you know about him?" asked Ida.

"I know he has acted like a cad in allowing you to go alone to his rooms," said Jack, still quietly. "Ask anybody—Mrs. Desmond, Miss Montague, Leonard. Ask Abdul, even. Even he, though he does not know what the word 'convention' means, would tell you that you mustn't do it."

Ida was unpinning her hat. At this she paused, with her hands to her head.

"Why do you say that?" she said, with a sudden ring of unfathomable suspicion in her tone. Then her voice rose a little. "You shall not ask Abdul," she exclaimed.

This, for the moment, was utterly mysterious to Jack. Then, like the reflection of far-off lightning, remote yet luminous, a possible explanation occurred. To do him justice, he rejected it, yet for one vivid second it had been there: Abdul arranged these things.

"I have no intention of asking Abdul," he said. "I don't know what you mean. Ask anybody: that is my point: take the opinion of any man or woman in the world whose judgment you trust. Ask Aunt Julia. You will see what she will say."

Then the woman in her rose to the surface uncontrollable. She could not bear that there should be this difference between them: yet her case was so clear to herself: the liberty he had given her with regard to these matters was so inalienably hers. Yet, in that she had given him herself, she could not for the moment weigh claim with claim, and instead she held out both hands to him.

"Jack!" she cried. "Oh, Jack!"

So far, also, the man could not resist. The two white hands he clasped in a great brown paw and kissed them.

"So that is all right, then," he said. "I knew it could not last. And oh, Ida, what an infernal thing jealousy is! And it grows so near to love, like the wheat and the tares: you can hardly touch one without pulling up the other. Yet one dare not wait for the harvest."

She paused at that, and her hands no longer returned the pressure of his. His words were meant as a confession, as an acknowledgment of the weakness that is inherent in the strength of love. But it struck her like a blow.

"Jealousy?" she said, as if scarcely understanding him.

"Yes: I saw you go there alone: I have been turned out of this room for you to receive him alone. Is not that enough?"

It seemed as if this sudden warmth that had inflamed him had been borrowed from her, for there was ice in her answer. She felt as if she hardly believed the evidence of her own ears, for the possibility of this had never peered over her most remote horizons.

"Do you mean that you have been—are jealous of Mr.

Henderson?" she asked. "Do I really understand you to mean that?"

Then in turn the man in him came to the surface. He spoke his thought, and it was tender, manly, yet domineering, as a man's love is. He raised his head, with a gesture full of the feeling that possessed him.

"No, I wronged myself," he said. "I have never yet been quite jealous of him. I have never, at least, welcomed or entertained that thought, for it implies that I should have mistrusted you, which I am not capable of. But you are rather hard on me, Ida. It is not easy for a man, when he loves as I do, to know that she who is the only woman in the world for him goes day after day alone to see a——"

"Yes?" said Ida, with the same iciness.

"To see a man who permits her to do so," said Jack bravely. "Oh, if you don't see that, it is hopeless for me to try to explain."

"Do you remember promising me absolute liberty in this life of mine which you refused to enter?" asked Ida.

"Perfectly well."

"I remind you, for the second time, of that promise."

"And I tell you that in this case you cannot separate your normal everyday life from the other," he said. "To fulfil the one you transgress the common, sensible rules of conduct, which, whatever we think of them, must be binding on us all. No one can make an exception of himself in such things. Besides, Ida, you do not know, even you, what power may not lurk behind. He is an edged tool, if ever I saw one."

Ida had grown suddenly pale.

"What power may lurk behind?" she said below her breath. "What are you talking about?"

At that his absolute ignorance of what she had in the very back of her mind was consolatory.

"No power that I know," he said. "But it is my right to keep not only known dangers, but possible and impossible ones, away from you."

Then again his anxious human love rose to the surface.

"What you do I don't know," he said. "There are visions, messages, communions, that come to you, I suppose. What they are I don't know, for, as you are perfectly aware, I am quite ignorant of all these things. But, Ida, Ida, he

has got—he has got no damnable incantations, has he, to bring you into what you believe to be his control? Is that the word? But you know what I mean. You are not, in that life of which I know nothing, dependent on him in any way, or beholden to him?”

The friction of their disagreement had died down: at last they rested on bed-rock.

“I am more beholden to Mr. Henderson than to anyone in the world,” she said. “He saved me from an edge that went down more steeply than the brink of death, and led to what was darker than death.”

Again his human love drove him forward: the whole man spoke.

“Ah, show me the death I will not save you from,” he cried; “and let me face it instead for you. Tortured and slow, or quick and rending as the lightning flash, it is all one—because I love you, and death matters not at all.”

Some faint, far-off note twanged in her brain, some reminiscence, perhaps, of a day of Sirocco in the South, when the palm-trees began to whisper together, and wave their arms, while vague, foreboding terror crept like the dark wing of night over the clearness of the heavens. It seemed to her that a distant trouble was stirring in some remote cavern of memory, from the darkness of which came cries and the sound of struggle. Love and death, as on the accursed amulet, were mysteriously mentioned together, but they were spoken of now on no long-buried amulet, but were on the lips of the man she loved. And at the thought of that dreadful thing, of that loosened spirit of evil, to lay which again love some day had to prove itself stronger than death, a sudden wave of fear submerged her soul, even though rescue stood close to her, within reach of her hand. Here was love, strong, eager to save, with hands outstretched to her, and she, instead of grasping those hands, throwing herself into his arms, was standing aloof, not surrendering, fortifying herself behind her own needs, her own rights, the promise he had given her. Again and again that wave of terror swept over her, dark and unbearable, hissing and hot, and she could stand apart no longer.

“Oh, Jack!” she cried, suddenly flinging herself into his arms. “I know that—I know that! Thank you, my dar-

ling, for that. Your love is stronger than death: I need not be afraid. But——”

“Ah, there is no ‘but,’” said he.

Again her soul was battered to and fro by conflicting needs.

“Ah, but there is,” she said. “You cannot guess what joy is mine when, by no magic or evil arts, but, so I believe, by the merciful and loving ways of God, I am allowed to be so closely joined to the spirit of my father that his actual presence is in every sense made real to me. You don’t, you can’t, ask me to give that up? I don’t think I could do it: I am not capable of refusing that sweet communion which is offered to me by—by him. It is Mr. Henderson who gives me that; it is he who enables me to be with my father almost more intimately, I think, than I was ever with him in life.”

She hid her face for a moment on his shoulder.

“But I will try,” she said. “I will do my very utmost. And I will promise you that Mr. Henderson’s influence over me—for he has influence—shall get no deeper. But there is nothing harder in the world. You can’t know, dear; it is impossible that you should know what you wish me to give up.”

“I can’t ask that—I don’t ask that,” he said. “But, Ida, Ida, don’t get under his influence. There, I have said it at last. I fear that—I fear that most horribly. Why I can’t tell you, but all these days that fear has been present to me like a feeling of physical sickness, a vague, awful dread that gets nearer every day. Even now, when my arms are round you, so that you must be safe, so that all the evil powers below the earth could not take you from me, while one gasp of breath remained in me, even now it is here.”

Suddenly Ida was conscious of a very curious sensation. She felt as if inside her brain she had heard Henderson calling to her by her Christian name, not loud, but quite audibly to some interior sense, in that firm, quiet voice of his that was so unmistakable and so arresting. She knew, too, that some interior impulse of her limbs urged her to go, just as she was, downstairs, across the square, up Davies Street, and to his flat, without a moment’s resistance or reflection. She knew, also, that he would be there, expecting her. The sensation was very vivid, but it hardly lasted a

second, and passed away completely. But for the moment it was horribly unsettling: she felt insecure.

Jack, too, noticed that something had happened; they had been speaking heart to heart, but for that moment it was as if some noise had completely arrested her attention, so that all other thought was suspended. She had raised her head from where it lay on his shoulder, and seemed for that moment as if she was completely unconscious of his presence. And her words confirmed this very disquieting impression.

"Did not somebody call me?" she asked. "Did you not hear anything? Surely somebody called 'Ida!'"

He smiled at her.

"Ah, what nonsense!" he said. "Someone was crying news in the Square. But nobody called you."

She collected herself again, and went back to what they had been saying when this little interruption came.

"I will do my utmost," she said. "It is true that Mr. Henderson has influenced, and does influence, my life: not the life of which you know anything—over that he has no control. But I promise you this, Jack, that I will allow his influence to go no deeper. I will——"

Again she paused, for again something in her brain spoke her name, calling to her. This second time she was frightened.

"Surely someone called me," she said.

Jack was infinite tenderness. She was overwrought with this last half-hour, and he raged against himself for not having somehow been more gentle with her.

"No, dear! no, dear!" he said; "it was but a street noise. You are tired, Ida. You look tired. Oh, forgive me for all I have said that has hurt you. But you know I did not mean it."

She raised her eyes to his.

"Dear, you could not hurt me," she said, "and while I have your love nothing can."

"And to the utmost shore of eternity it is yours," said he.

Jack Carbery left the house with a feeling of vague perplexity and dread that was utterly new to him. Night had fallen, a clear night of stars; there was a hint of frost in the air, and the world went briskly about its many busi-

nesses. Up and down the pavements jostled the conflicting tides of human life, at street corners was cried the news of the evening, and he found himself wondering with a fantastic exercise of the imagination that was foreign to him what news was to-night cried abroad in the world of souls and spirits, and whether there too, as on earth, there were wars and rumours of war, and perplexities that harassed its unseen, silent denizens. There was still an hour to be spent before he need dress for dinner, but to-night, somehow, the thought of his cosy comfortable flat, with its chair drawn to the fire, its evening paper ready by the elbow, was abhorrent: he did not know what he should do with himself alone, and something craved for the proximity of his fellow-men, even though they were but strangers that passed and repassed him in the streets. It was in vain that he told himself that there was nothing conceivable to fear, that his vague, mist-magnified terrors were but the result of some obscure jangling of his nerves, some infinitesimal physical disorder that had set trembling and vibrating a piece, perhaps, of gray matter in the brain that should have been at rest, or busy with normal and every-day affairs. Yet, search as he would, he could not put his finger on any tangible cause of disturbance. He hated the thought of Ida's visits to Henderson, he deplored the fact of her going there alone, but nothing, he felt sure, could possibly cut at the roots of that great mutual love that made the sunshine of his life; for his trust in her, the impossibility of mistrust entering, was never stronger than at this moment. Yet in some unintelligible way the cloud that was over him cast its shadow even over that: something threatened him there, and though a hundred times he told himself of the utter impossibility of any threat being able to harm him, yet his own self contradicted its own assertions. This was no transient physical or mental depression that beleaguered him: it was round the very fortress and shrine of his being that the shadows grew and gathered in dim, inimical panoply. Out of that darkness, he felt, some blow would be struck.

He had halted a moment at the top of St. James's Street, looking down the narrowing avenue of gas-lamps to where the clock in the Palace showed like a moon, uncertain whether to walk on or, taking firm hold of himself, to go home and force himself into normal behaviour, when a

dozen doors down on the right he saw the windows of a second-floor room suddenly spring into squares of vivid light. He knew the house well; those illuminated squares of window belonged to the flat of Leonard Compton, and in a second his mind was made up. There was no brain that he knew so cool and sane as Leonard's, no touch so reassuring, no hand so firm and yet so kind in dealing, not only with physical surgery, but with the much more delicate handling of the mind. He determined to go to him at once, to tell him without reservation all the possible causes he had for disquiet, sparing himself not the vaguest, the silliest, the most shadowy suspicions, and see whether Leonard would not laugh him out of half of them, and argue him out of the rest before dinner-time. Furthermore, Leonard, as he knew, had at one time dived into occult matters, and Jack, in this present crisis of nerves and affections, would be very glad to know for certain that he was like a child, afraid merely of what was apparently dark. Also, to tell anybody the grounds of his disquiet was a relieving prospect: for the causes of depression, he knew well, breed in solitude, and in company often become barren again.

In a couple of minutes he was seated in the comfortable, familiar room. On the hearth burned a bright fire, the shaded radiance of electric light gave a mellow glow to red carpets and green walls, a bookcase full of fat medical volumes was somehow reassuring, a cigarette was already between his fingers, and a glass at his elbow, with the nozzle of a siphon over it, waited his "say when." Leonard meantime, delighted to see him, was still uttering welcoming words.

"I have often thought of starting a guild of mercy or a charitable league, or something," he was saying, "whose work should be to call on people who live alone in flats, like you and me, between six and seven during the winter months. It is the time which I have nothing for: I have already done my work for the day—I cannot work after five, or I lie awake—it is dark and one cannot go out, and there is still more than an hour before dinner. An hour in which you have nothing you must do, and no inclination to do anything you needn't, is a very long hour. You shall be the president, Jack, because you are the first person, I think, who ever came to see me at this awful time.

Table for your drink: there it is. Drink for your table, you have it also. You've taken a cigarette, that's right, so now have you got everything?"

Jack already felt slightly better: the mere human presence of a friend, that thing more potent than the drugs of Arabia, had on the instant done him good. Yet because he felt better, the situation, so he reflected, as it existed apart from his nerves, was not altered. So whether the disturbance was subjective or objective, he determined to speak.

"It is you who have to be the guild of mercy to me this evening," he said; "I have come not to give, but I hope to receive. I came to you to get rid of a dark hour myself; I want you to throw light on it."

Leonard turned to him quickly with a sort of bird-like movement that was characteristic of him.

"Anything wrong?" he asked, his mind already flown back to the visitor they had seen leaving Henderson's door that afternoon.

"I don't know whether anything is wrong or not," said Jack. "I came to you really in order to be convinced that it is my inside in some way which is wrong."

"Symptoms," said Leonard shortly. "Loss of appetite, sleeplessness—nothing of that sort, I suppose?"

"No, not that kind of thing at all," said Jack, feeling suddenly incapable of speech. "I'm about as well, I should think, as anybody in London."

Leonard looked at him a moment, and saw he was struggling with some considerable trouble—saw, too, with his doctor's eye, that speech was difficult. The first necessity, therefore, was to make speech easier for him.

"Well, take your time, old boy," he said. "I'm going to lie down on this sofa here. When you feel inclined to tell me, why, tell me. I shan't interrupt you, and remember that we've got lots of time—all the time there is, in fact."

This, after a little, was efficacious: Jack smoked a fraction of his cigarette, drank a little of his whisky-and-soda, and spoke with frequent pauses.

"I'm in an awful stew, Leonard," he said, "and I want you to tell me whether there is anything to be in a stew about. Yes, it concerns Ida and me, for, really, I don't think there is anything in the world that could upset me as this does. It concerns, also, all this occult muck, which I

hate the name of. You know she is very thick with Henderson, and she goes to see him at his flat, and she goes alone."

Leonard had taken his legs off the sofa, and was sitting up. It was just as he had expected, then.

"Yes; how did you know that?" he asked quickly.

"She told me herself an hour ago. Did you know?"

"Yes."

"You ought to have told me, then."

"I only knew this afternoon, Jack," said he, "because Beatrice and I saw her leaving the flat. I said at the time that you must be told. Beatrice said she would tell Ida so. Otherwise I should have told you myself. I had fully determined to do so, and if you had not come in I should probably have written to you before dinner to ask you to do so."

"I see. Well, that's the first thing that bothers me. It's impossible, you know. Such things don't happen. Yet I felt such a brute for telling her so. It had never occurred to her, I think, that people would talk if they knew, or that girls can't do such things. She is so utterly removed from thoughts like that; and her innocence is her danger."

"Quite so," said Leonard sharply. "And what else passed between you?"

Jack had got on to his feet again, for a horrible restlessness made him incapable of sitting still, and chucked his half-smoked cigarette into the fireplace.

"Nothing can be really wrong between Ida and me," he said nervously; "all my life is staked on that, and there is nothing in the world, so I keep telling myself, of which I am so certain. And even while I say that to myself, something—something creeps up out of the dark—I don't know what—and the solid ground shakes under me. That is why I came here: I want you to laugh at me, to tell me I am frightening myself with shadows. But the shadows are so thick, and they are lengthening so frightfully."

But Leonard did not do as he was asked and laugh at him: he still looked quite grave.

"I can't laugh at you yet," he said, "because I don't know what has happened, and what you are merely imagining. But I'll laugh at you as soon as I can. So tell me all that you remember about your talk with Miss Ida; don't

leave out even the things which most unreasonably disturb you, even if they appear to you the most trivial details. And especially I want to know what are her relations with Henderson—how she regards him."

"Ah, it is just that—it is just that which most disturbs me," said Jack quickly. "She says that she is more beholden to him than anyone in the world, that he saved her from something more terrible than death. Now, what can that mean? What on earth can that mean? I've been turning it over and over in my head, and I can make nothing of it."

"I don't know," said Leonard bluntly; "at least—no, I don't know. But I make a note of that, and we may have to go back to that afterwards. At present go on."

"Well, by his help somehow, she says also she is in closer touch with the spiritual world, and in particular with her father, than ever before, and when I ask her to give up these séances with Henderson, she tells me I am asking her to do the most difficult thing in the world. And I have promised, you know, not to interfere in any way with her inner, her spiritual life. I feel as if it is dishonourable in me even to wish her to give them up. But I'm past that. Then——"

Jack paused a moment, running over in his mind the points of his conversation with Ida.

"Then, for some reason," he went on, "she does not want Abdul to know about this—the fact that she has séances with Henderson, I mean."

Leonard looked up quickly.

"Ah, why do you think that?" he asked. "Did she state that expressly, or did you infer it only?"

"It was clear enough, because when I said, 'Ask anybody if it is right for you to go to his rooms, ask Abdul even,' she exclaimed, 'You shall not ask Abdul.' She was certainly agitated at the thought of Abdul's knowing."

Leonard got up and walked up and down the room, frowning heavily at the carpet. Suddenly he stopped and faced Jack.

"Now, did any explanation of any kind whatever," he asked, "come into your mind to account for her not wanting him to know?"

Jack flushed a little.

"Yes, but only to reject it at once. But for one moment it occurred to me that Abdul arranges these meetings, is a go-between. But I don't really believe that."

"The point is that she doesn't want you to refer to Abdul in the matter, to let him know anything about it," said Leonard. "Go on."

Jack looked at him in a sort of helplessness for a moment.

"Oh, Leonard," he said, "I feel such a brute talking over Ida like this with anyone, even with you. But I must have advice; I can't go on in this dreadful state of fright and suspense. I fear every ring at the bell—I fear that everyone coming into the room has bad news for me. It isn't that I distrust one word or action of hers: I couldn't. But I can't help feeling she is in danger."

"Go on," said Leonard, without comment. "Of course I understand that. By the way, you may say you are well, but your nerves are out of order. But go on."

"Then I mismanaged things," he continued, the interview coming back to him with biting clearness. "I told her how near I was to jealousy. She hated that, and we went off at score again. Then I attacked Henderson: I remember calling him an edged tool: I warned her—I knew nothing of these things—that there might be some power behind him. And she was frightened. She asked me what power I meant, and of course I didn't know."

"Yes, yes," said Leonard. "Go on."

"That is about all," said Jack. "She promised me that she would allow Henderson's influence to get no deeper, for she gave me to understand quite clearly that he has influence over her. And at the end, of course, we—well, we were ourselves."

Leonard was again frowning heavily.

"Allow his influence to get no deeper?" he said slowly.

"Yes. She acknowledges he has influence."

Leonard still pondered this.

"And that is all?" he asked. "You have told me all the causes of your disquietude."

Jack smiled rather dismally. The consolation that he had come for had not as yet been much in evidence; as yet, too, there had been no hint of laughter.

"I am so fearfully upset," he said, "that a singing-bird, I believe, would make me nervous. There was just one thing

more. They were crying the evening news in the Square, and twice she thought that somebody was calling her. It frightened her."

"What?" said Leonard quickly. "She heard somebody calling her?"

Poor Jack had come to be laughed out of his terrors, but it seemed rather to be his office to laugh Leonard out of his.

"My dear chap," he said, "you know one often thinks one hears one's name. It has happened to me dozens of times. What is the matter? It was absolutely nothing more than that. What she thought was her name was just some paper-seller in the Square. I heard him call myself just at that moment."

Leonard pulled himself together.

"Yes, of course, of course," he said. "Well, Jack!"

He paused a moment.

"Sit down," he said. "Now, Jack, you've got to buck up, and not let yourself be afraid. A frightened man never did any good, any more than a bucking horse. Also you are indefinitely frightened, which is paralyzing, because you imagine dangers from every quarter which don't exist. You are afraid of everything just now; that's what it comes to."

Jack braced himself to this.

"You mean danger does exist?" he said.

"It may. If it exists, it exists because Henderson has some influence over Miss Ida. What this is I can't say; but I will think it over. Two points I want to ask you again. The first is that these séances are very wonderful and precious experiments to her. They are something more vivid and real than anything she has yet known. Was it not that she told you?"

"I can't be certain about her exact words, but I am perfectly certain about her meaning."

"And twice she thought she was being called?"

"Yes."

Leonard nodded his head.

"Mind, I don't say for a moment there is danger of any sort," he said, "but I know, which you do not, that occult powers do exist, and that they may be put into play. Also it is perfectly true that this fellow knows a great deal about them, and can do odd things. Now I will think it all over,

and tell you when I have made up my mind, as to whether there is anything to fear or not. But whether there is or not, don't be afraid: hold your head up."

He paused.

"You must go now," he said. "The league of mercy has already made me late for dinner. Good-night, old chap; don't ask any more questions now, because I can't answer them."

But when Jack had gone Leonard did not at once go to dress, though already late. He stood frowning into the fire, and tapping with his foot uneasily on the fender.

"She hears him calling to her," he said to himself. "Already he can make her hear him."





SIXTEENTH

IT was about a week after this last recorded conversation between Leonard and Jack, and Ida was sitting alone one afternoon in her little public sitting-room next the sanctum in her suite upstairs. A book was on her knee, but she was not reading it, and as often as a footfall sounded in the passage outside she looked up, as if expecting someone to enter. Though the book was unread, it was not unread from drowsiness, no languor dictated her abstention from literature, for she was almost nervously wide awake; she was waiting, so it would seem, for something more absorbing than her book. The window was wide open, for the February day was full of the early languorous warmth of spring, and often, if the jingle of a cab ceased suddenly outside, she went hastily and looked out of the window that overlooked the street to see whether it had stopped at her aunt's door. Her face, always rather pale, had perhaps a little more colour than its wont, and her eyes certainly were neither dark nor heavy, but had in them a quite unusual sparkle; her meditation, therefore, was of no stolid order. Yet, had a doctor seen her, he would not, in all probability, have been quite satisfied with her looks; a clever man would have classed under one bracket her rather vivid colour, the alertness of her eye, and the evident nervousness and restlessness which she exhibited even now when alone. If he had been told that she was in love, indeed and shortly to be married, he might possibly have been more satisfied about her, but even then he would probably have said he would call again in a day or two and see how she was. But there had been no question of her seeing a doctor, and such a thing had not occurred either to Ida herself or to Mrs. Desmond. The girl was not in the least anxious about herself, but she was aware that one person was anxious about her—namely, Abdul. Leonard Compton she had not

seen all this week, otherwise there might have been two people anxious about her. Yet, since his anxiety could not possibly have helped matters, it was as well, perhaps, that they had not come together. For he had nothing fresh; the data Jack had given him a week ago were still no more than simmering in his mind.

Since her interview with Jack a week ago, Ida had lived a life of silent, secret heroism, and no one in the world knew how much it had cost her. She had not been to Henderson's flat since then, and though he had called twice at Berkeley Square, on both occasions she had sent word that she was not in. She felt sure, too, that he knew that her "not-at-home" was a technical phrase, for on one of these occasions she, returning home in a cab, had passed him only a hundred yards from the house, and it seemed to her certain that he must have seen her enter. That, however, she could not help; indeed, it was better that he should understand as soon as possible that she did not intend to see him again. During this week, too, he had given his second lecture: it was crowded to overflowing, even as the first had been. But Ida, to her aunt's great surprise, had stayed away, and Mrs. Desmond had gone there alone.

All through this week, a dozen times, perhaps, in a day, his voice had called to her, and as often as it called there ran through her limbs that mysterious inward impulse that she must go to him. It was so strong that sometimes she felt herself moving towards the door, before she could control herself; once she found herself pulling away from the very door-handle, as if pulling a dead weight, the hand that would have turned it. For all her inner and spiritual life pined to go; in five minutes, if she but yielded to this impulse, which seemed daily to be growing more overmastering, she would be awake from this dim dream of the exterior life of the senses, and by a few passes of his hand, a little gazing into those black lakes of eyes, pass out into what was the real world. One thing only had held her back all this week, her human love for Jack, to whom she had given her word that she would do her utmost. She was doing her utmost: she had not known before she was capable of so much. But day after day she knew that her powers of resistance were getting less: something relentless and untiring pulled against her. The struggle had gone on almost

without interruption, and it was the worse and the harder to bear because she had to bear it all in silence, and could not go to any for sympathy and support. Sometimes she seemed to forget about it for the time, so that it sank like a stone into deep waters; when Jack was with her, and when she meditated, the cords that dragged her seemed to relax a little, though she was always conscious that they were there, as securely tied as ever. Of Henderson, meantime, she had heard nothing: after his second attempt to see her he had not tried again, neither had he written to her the shortest line, alluding to the discontinuance of their séances, or asking, as he had every right to do, the reason for her thus withdrawing herself. Nor was there any need for communication of ink and pen: every day his voice called to her. Yet the calling of her name to her was in itself, she felt, not difficult of resistance: it was that to which it beckoned her—those extraordinary communings with her father—for which her soul cried out. She was quite well able to separate in her mind this dual nature of the call: Henderson called to her, or the semblance of his voice within her brain called—calling, as it were, for himself alone, because he wanted her to come, because he loved her. And all the sweetness and beauty of her nature was sorry for him: she had been often now to his rooms, he had hypnotized her four or five times, and not once had he by word or hint ever spoken of his love for her again, or let it be ever so lightly obtruded on her. But it was there all the time: it was that which called to her. Yet when she was with him it never lifted its voice; it sat very patient, content, or so it would appear, to see her, content to serve her in these wonderful spiritual ways. That love seemed to Ida very beautiful in its utter self-renunciation: it was hopeless, and she thought he knew it to be hopeless, but it was unembittered, and it served. And if at times it could not help calling to her, that was only pitiful; there was nothing to fear. For she still trusted him as much as ever; not by word, or deed, or thought had he ever done anything to shake or disturb that. He was still her friend, the man to whom she owed her deliverance from that which was darker than death.

Her book was "Cranford," and soon—for there was something quieting in this last thought—she took it up again, and read several pages with fair attention. Then, all of a sud-

den, a sort of spasm of envy took possession of her, as had happened once or twice before, at the thought of quiet, normal human life, as lived by the huge majority of the world, as pictured in these pages. Why had it not been given her, so she wondered, with an aching longing for security, to live in the great green pasturages, beside pleasant waters, lifting her eyes to the hills indeed, but safe herself in happy valleys? Safety! it was that for the moment which seemed to her the best of all gifts, not to be afraid of terrors coming from the dark, of awful blows being suddenly dealt at her. And in those valleys where others dwelt, love walked, hearts beat high with resolves not less noble because they were not obscure and occult; there were kindly human eyes to look into, behind which no hint of terror lurked; self-sacrifice, pity, duty, death, all these great and simple things were there, and these were surely enough to feed and refresh the soul. Instead, she seemed to herself to be so made that it was forced on her to be for ever climbing far away from the happy valleys, climbing by herself up some precipitous and icy glacier stair. True, glories unimaginable to those below were her reward. Sunrise would flood the peaks with transcendent rose; the air blew on her from the very gates of the morning; the celestial day was close at hand. But at other times the sun set; she was alone at night, voices moaned in the wind, and from the bottomless crevasses among which she pursued her hair-breadth path came dim sounds and warnings which she did not understand, but knew to be of fearful import. She was tired: she longed to lay it all down and rest, her hand in Jack's, knowing that his patient, loving eyes kept watch over her; but that was not to be: she had to go on. But she so longed to rest, to let her eyes close, and no longer to be directing terrified glances this way and that, anticipating dangers the nature of which she could not even guess.

Then her mood changed. All the girl's fine courage and gratitude came to her aid, and she sprang up, letting "Cranford" fall to the ground. Was there ever, she asked herself, a woman so weak, was there ever a soul so vilely ungrateful? She was wrapped warm in the shelter and the cloak of love: love on all sides surrounded her. Jack, Henderson, Abdul, all in their divers ways protected and encircled her, yet, because the glory of going on was so wonderfully

granted her, she was sighing to turn back, she was saying the way was too steep, the path too narrow for her to tread. Spiritless, she was wishing that she was allowed to be dozing in green meadows, a very cow, a tree, a snail among the burdocks.

Again she paused as these moods flashed one after the other into her mind like sudden pictures projected by some magic-lantern in the dark. There was something else—something she could not remember. She was waiting here, she knew that, expecting the arrival of Henderson. But why did she expect him? She could not clearly make that out in her own mind. All she remembered was that after lunch to-day, now nearly an hour ago, the voice that called her had called so loud, so insistently, that she had excused herself from going out with her aunt, and had come up here alone, afraid that her brain, her self-control, would play her some dreadful trick, that she would find herself answering him, unable any longer to control her tongue and lips. And surely she had answered him, for she expected him. She had answered him after a long struggle, in which——

She took two steps across the room to her writing bureau. Beneath it stood the waste-paper basket, and with trembling hands she pulled out a couple of crumpled sheets, still not exactly knowing what she expected to find on them. On one was written merely, "Dear Mr. Henderson," and she had then thrown it away. On the other was written, "Dear Mr. Henderson,—I shall be in this after——" and then that stopped, too. But she had written a third note—she remembered that—but though she turned out the whole of the paper-basket there was no trace of it. Then she searched through the blotting-book, but it was not there, nor was it lying in the fender, nor was there any trace of her having burned it.

At this she paused, her hand over her eyes, as her mind whirled dizzily towards the certain conclusion.

"I must have sent it," she said to herself, and she shuddered and despaired, for she felt that her very will was no longer her own.

At this moment the sharp trotting of horse's hoofs, the jingling of a hansom bell, was cut suddenly off. Then the front-door bell rang.

For one moment her eyes closed, and she moved her hands

as if warding something off, keeping it at arm's length, and below her breath she murmured:

"No, no! ah, no!"

Then the moving of her hands ceased, and she stood there with bent head, beaten. She had done her utmost, but there was something too strong for her, and with her own hands, though she could scarcely remember it, she no doubt had written to him asking him to come. The struggle was over; she had been unequal to it, and she had yielded. And this "No, no!" that came from quivering lips, was but a drowning cry, an appeal like the dying wail of an animal, to the blind, deaf, inexorable law that demands its death. There was no more fight left in her, and when the servant came up to know if she would see Mr. Henderson, she merely nodded her head in assent.

That was over, then, and slowly, but with ever-increasing effulgence and effervescence, like sun shining through the clear bubbling waters of a crystal pool into which plunges a living stream, a dawn of that light which never was on sea or land began to glimmer in the blackness of the sky. Once again (and this week-long drought and abstinence had made her parched and agonized with thirst) the wonderful communions with the spirit of her father would be hers again; she would awake from this dim-lit, unreal existence, and come out into the sun, into the glory not yet openly manifested, but to her vouchsafed to be revealed. Soon again in the clear day her spirit would commune with her father's: she would look on him and be satisfied.

Then Henderson entered, and, as once before, there were no greetings of commonplace at first. His eyes were fixed on her with a hungry, devouring gaze: they no longer compelled and commanded her: they were suppliant and besought her. And she met them with eyes of pity, for his whole face, and not his eyes alone, was the face of a man who thirsts with an unquenchable thirst, and who now looks on the water which alone can satisfy him.

Then she held out her hand to him. There was no need of explanations, for she knew that all that she had been through was as clear to him as if it had been he who had experienced it.

"And you have suffered, too?" she said. "I am sorry."

"I did not know that hell itself possessed these tortures,"

he said. Then the bitterness overcame him. "And I am not there yet," he added.

That gruesome little bit of jest touched Ida more sharply than any complaint could have done.

"I have suffered, too," she said; "and part of my suffering was for you, when you called to me. You have called so often. And you have wanted me, poor thing! so much."

"I call all the time," he said, "and sometimes I cannot restrain it, and call aloud—not aloud with my voice, you understand, but with my spirit. I let the cry go out to you. It is then you hear me."

"Please don't," she said quite simply, "for it is no use. You know I am sorry."

Then, side by side with the flame of his love, as it soared higher, there rose, too, all that was masterful and brutal, burning with red and scorching fire.

"I don't want your sorrow," he cried. "I have no use for it. What is your sorrow to me? How does that help me? It is you I want."

He could no longer control himself, and the words poured out.

"You can't tell me it is no use," he said. "I hold for you, I represent to you, all that your soul desires. With me, and with no other, you can scale those heights on which alone now you feel that you can live and breathe. All this week you have gone without food and air. You have been starving and suffocating yourself, and you have no right to treat your soul like that, for you must render an account of it. And you must not think that you can marry this other, and yet come to me again and again to give you that which keeps you alive and makes you grow. I can't do it: the flesh is weak, I suppose, and it is outside my physical power to go on seeing you as I have done—seeing all that is best in you, that which I worship, expanding like a flower, and then see you go away and give that flower to another. I am a man: my flesh and blood will not stand it. You are trying me beyond what I can bear. Either you are mine altogether, or I will never see you again."

He came a step closer to her with something of menace in his voice.

"Already you are mine more than you think," he went on. "I have but to raise my voice, wherever I am, and you hear,

and you feel as if you must obey the call. Indeed, this afternoon you have obeyed it, for you have answered me and told me to come. And wherever you are, and to whomever you think you give yourself, I can never silence the cry that my soul makes to you. You will wake in his arms with my voice ringing in your ears. You will speak of love to him, and even as the words are on your lips you will rise and go to the door, feeling that you must obey the voice that tells you to come to me, and your love for him will be blown about like a withered leaf in autumn. You will——”

Ida had been looking at him with a sort of fascinated horror, as if paralyzed, unable to move. But here she recovered herself.

“Stop!” she said, “not a word more. You are saying intolerable things.”

“Because I suffer what is intolerable,” said he; but his voice sank and faltered and was silent.

Then he moved across to the window and came back again, as she stood still, her bosom heaving with the indignation that his words had roused.

“Forgive me,” he said very low. “I didn’t know what I was saying. I knew nothing but my need, and it is hopeless: you have told me so. But are you sure? There are very few things of which we can say, ‘This is impossible.’”

His eyes were fixed on hers now with an intensity of gaze which she knew well. They raged no longer, nor did they entreat, but very quietly they commanded. She felt that if she looked a moment longer she would be unable to look away at all, but by an effort, so violent that she felt as if something must have been torn, she turned from him.

“Ah, it is horrible!” she said. “But I am sure. I say it is impossible. All through this week, which has been to me one moment of torture, I have felt that, if it were to go on till it killed me, I could never give you any answer but that. So take that answer like a man, Mr. Henderson, and since you say that in this case you cannot see me any more, let me thank you out of a very full and very sorrowful heart for all you have done for me. You have delivered me from the most dire perils, and it is through you that the greatest happinesses of my life have come to me.”

Again, with hand outstretched, she looked at him, with a smile that hovered over her face rather than dwelt on it.

"You must forget that I said that," he murmured; "I did not know what I said. You promised once to let me help you, and you must do so. You must come to me again. I think it is the week's abstinence from seeing you that has driven me half mad. You would not deny me those crumbs, for I have no other bread. And to you, too, remember those hours are the richest, the best in all your spiritual experience. You will not be doing right if you wilfully forego them: you will be maiming and maltreating your soul—starving it, not letting it grow."

She thought of what she had promised Jack, that she would not let Henderson's influence over her get any deeper, and shook her head. For that promise there was no sacrifice too great: she was her own no longer. She had given herself to her lover.

"No, I must give them up," she said. "I promised——" And she paused a moment.

He waited for her to continue; he had a right, she felt, to know, and she told him.

"Every time you hypnotize me," she said rather nervously, "your influence over me gets deeper. Do you remember at first how it took some time before I passed into sleep? And each time it has become easier and quicker. I must not let it go on. I—I am afraid. I am no longer really mistress of myself. And you must give me back myself, because it is not mine, but his, Jack's."

Then, like a wicked flicker of lightning, a thought struck home into Henderson's brain, sudden, illuminating, and he welcomed the evil luminance, for it showed him for the first time quite definitely the path he had already half unconsciously determined to follow. Not till this afternoon had he really faced the fact that, by all the common human laws of affection and love, Ida was as completely out of his reach as the moon in heaven, nor till this afternoon, when she had shown him so sweet a pity and forbearance in answer to his violence, had he known how implacably his whole will and all his energies were set on winning her. And a dreadful secret joy filled him, as bitter salt-water floods an estuary, at the fact that it was already known to her that his influence was increasing over her. How strong it already was perhaps she did not yet guess, but he saw, and exulted when he saw, that she was already only just capable, should he

choose to turn it in full blast upon her, of resistance. Soon she would be able to resist no longer, and she would be his by right of conquest. He would prove himself a stronger man than Jack Carbery, and by virtue of his strength carry off the prize they both struggled for.

Not till to-day had he definitely decided on this, though his decision now was so swift that he must have been long on the brink of it. For he had hoped that he could have made himself so essential to her, that of her own free will she would have consented to throw over Jack Carbery, realizing in her own conscious and willing self that he could not give her anything of that life which was as needful to her as the air she breathed. But, in so far as her will was still her own and independent of Henderson, she rejected him; she chose instead—this moment she had chosen—the human love that was offered her and the human love that she herself felt. For the first time to-day Henderson admitted this as certain, and now for the first time he resolved to employ what influence he had over her in any way that could attain for him his end. Till now he had fought for her with weapons such as others used; now from his armoury he brought a weapon they had not got—his hypnotic power over her, which none could wrest from him, the blows of which there was no shield to parry. And deeper yet within that armoury, he knew, lay another weapon—a torpedo, so to speak, a thing resistless, should all else fail. Yet not even now did he consciously consider its employment: only the consideration of its employment had come a step nearer. It was not indeed within the horizon yet, but it was not far beyond the horizon.

She trusted him: he was sure of that; indeed, until just this moment she had been quite right in doing so. But that resolve once made, he passed outside the pale of mankind. And his attack was deadly.

"No doubt I can hypnotize you more easily now than at first," he said, "but have I deserved what you said next? You are afraid? What do you mean?"

This cut her to the heart, just because there were solid grounds for his reproach. Jack did not trust him one inch; it was entirely in response to his misgivings that her resolution to sit in séance with him no more had been made. For herself, she trusted him completely.

"Yes, I said I was afraid," she said. "It is true I said that. But not of you, indeed, Mr. Henderson. I did not mean that. But I must, I must be in my own control. For the last week you, your love—I believe it to be that—have been like an obsession to me. Let me go, then. Take it away, I beseech you; it is too strong for me, it is breaking me! You have no right——"

Her voice faltered, and the sentence ended in a quick-drawn breath. For one moment a better man than he really was stood there; and his implacable will softened just on the surface, as the sun may thaw the surface of ice, yet not penetrate. And it was her very beauty, this very beauty of involuntary weakness and appeal, that hardened him again, so that he was dead to all but his desire.

"How can I let love go?" he said. "Is it a wild bird that one snares into a cage? Am not I rather the wild bird that you have snared? No, not willingly: you could not help it. You being you, must have been loved by me. It was ordained so; God himself must have ordained that."

Her eyes were dimmed, though her voice that had broken was clear again. She made her appeal to him.

"Then, because you love me, leave me alone," she said. "It seems to you, and no doubt it will often seem to me in the days to come, that I have chosen a lower level, when a higher might have been mine. God knows. But I love the man who loves me. I can't get behind that; it is a fact which cannot be rebuffed. There is no foe it fears, no fear that it will not face, because it is right. God has ordained that too. So let me go."

Then suddenly her mind went back to a night in March, when Sirocco stirred in the trees, and deadly terror came near to her.

"Because you are my friend," she added. "Because you have already done so very much for me."

"Yet your friend cannot cease to love you," said he, for all softening was over, "and his love cannot cease to call to you."

The love that women have to be loved, the pity of the star for the moth, was hers.

"No, my friend," she said. "So call to me if you must, and all that I have of pity and regret and gratitude responds to your call. I want to tell you that with my whole heart."

All that is yours. But my whole heart tells me that I can give you nothing else. Indeed I have nothing else, for all I have is given already."

But the die was cast. Once, perhaps, this might have appealed, and not in vain. Now it was without effect. By any means that were his he would draw her to him. And his thought was quick and apt.

"So then," he said, "it is good-bye. And it is good-bye to another besides me. Never again, so you have determined, will you meet your father as you have done, until the dawn of the everlasting day. To me in a moment you will say good-bye. Do you not wish to say it to him?"

He waited for her answer with an intensity of expectation that he had never yet known. For it was clear to him that his influence over her was all but paramount. He was on the very border-line of complete ascendancy over her: it was not yet absolutely assured, but it was very near. Let him but hypnotize her once more, and he felt sure that her will would pass into his keeping, so that he could mould her actions and her very motives as a sculptor moulds the clay beneath the graving tool. And down in hell Satan must have smiled at the ingenuity of his last question.

And at it all the longing, all the thirst, that Ida felt for one more communication, one more half-hour in the bodily and spiritual presence of her father, rose irresistibly: she could not resist that desire.

"There can be no harm," she said. "I feel as if I could not leave all—all that it has been to me without a word of farewell. Farewell!" she repeated.

"You have chosen it so," said he. "You must remember it is absolutely your own choice."

Then for the first time she fully felt what she was going to forego. But she did not falter.

"Yes, I have chosen it so," she said. "But I will say 'farewell.' When—when would it suit you?"

The dreadful *banalité* of the phrase, as if she was to play lawn-tennis, grated on her ears.

"One has to arrange even this," she said.

He looked at her again with the compulsion of his black eyes.

"Now," he said, "if you are disengaged. Why should we

wait? It is always best, if it is to be farewell, to say it quickly."

"But, Mr. Henderson—the medium," she asked.

Again Henderson looked at her.

"I left him in trance at my flat," he said. "There is no need to send for him. He is waiting."

A sudden misgiving stirred in the girl, not strong, only the fluttering of leaves in an aspen to a breath that cannot be felt. She was not herself afraid; she was only aware, and that dimly, for her eyes had been fixed on his for some seconds, that there might be fear.

"Did you foresee this, then?" she asked, already sleepily.

"I did not know: I thought it might happen. So I prepared for the contingency merely to save trouble."

Her eyes swam a little as she still continued to look at him. As she had said, it became easier for him each time to hypnotize her; she passed almost imperceptibly into sleep. She pointed to the door into the sanctum.

"We will go in there," she said. "He knows that room. I know it too. His voice is familiar to me there. Come!"

She would have led the way, but Henderson backed before her to the door still looking into her eyes. Ida went across to the little prie-dieu, and her lips moved, but her eyes were still open, still looking at him, who stood like Mephistopheles between her and prayer. Then she sat down on her accustomed seat, and Henderson was still opposite to her. And speaking as if speaking in her sleep, she said:

"Draw the curtain."

But he did not do so. He continued to look at her. Then very slowly, very gradually, so that you could scarcely say that it moved at any one moment, he raised his hand in front of her face, and let it fall again, like the slow rise and fall of some long gentle swell out in mid-ocean that lifts a ship so gradually that its movement is imperceptible. Four times he did this, and at the fourth her eyes slowly closed and her head fell back.

Then after a little she raised her head again, and her eyes opened, but not on to the material world: she saw neither the man who sat opposite to her nor the familiar plain little room; the light of the open vision of things unseen illuminated her face. Like the slow dawning of day it seemed

to Henderson that she woke, woke from the dimness of this world to the brightness of the spiritual kingdoms. Her lips parted, and words which he could not hear came from them; her hand was raised in welcome, and it seemed to him as if she raised her face to be kissed. So wonderful and beautiful was the sight of her that, brute as he was, he had no temptation even to touch her or to draw an inch closer to her; but his mouth was dry, and his pulse hammered in his temples as he gazed at her, and filled his eyes with gazing, as a thirsty man drinks deep with thirst unquenchable. For a moment his best self was awakened, and he knew that the world could hold no finer joy for him than, though he was nothing to her, to see her thus, to let his love flow towards her, without counting the cost to himself, without even desiring her love in return. For this is love triumphant, when it seeks not itself, but is poured out for another, in full flood unrestricted.

For some quarter of an hour, it might be, the two sat thus: Ida full of the joy of her communion, he almost content to watch her, to know that this joy was his gift to her, beyond price, and not to be sold or bought or bartered for—a joy that none else could give her, and to a better man than he reward enough for his love. Then slowly, even as it had begun, the rapture faded, the mouth grew grave again, the eyes fluttered once or twice and closed, and her head fell back. She was again in the deep hypnotic sleep out of which just now she had emerged into the light of the spiritual day, from which in a moment he would call her back into the twilight of the material world. And it was this moment which was peculiarly his: when she was fully herself, his power over her was not yet established: when the vision was being granted her again she escaped him. But just now her conscious life was dead; she was waiting inert and responsive to him alone, scarcely more, indeed, than an emanation from his own mind. And at this moment temptation fell upon him with the might of a man armed, and overcame him.

"Come to me when next I call to you," he said in a low, authoritative voice. "You will not be able to prevent your coming. Come in your conscious self, and because you must, and because you choose to, and because the strongest call earth holds for you is this. Do you hear?"

She gave a little sigh, and her breathing was suspended a moment.

"Yes, I hear," she said.

For one moment more he hesitated. Should he undo this that he had just done, a thing that he knew to be dastardly, blackguardly? But both those qualities were uppermost in him now, driven, so to speak, in double harness by his desire for her. He struck her lightly on the backs of the hands.

"Wake, wake," he said.

Ida moved quickly in her chair, and opened her eyes with a little startled cry.

"What is it?" she said. "What happened then?"

She passed her hands over her eyes, as if clearing them of the last mists of sleep, and looked round the room. Henderson had risen, and was looking out of the window. Then she seemed to forget about that which had prompted her question to him.

"Ah, Mr. Henderson," she said, "it was wonderful. It was the best of all. I have never been so close. And I said good-bye to him, telling him that I could not again see him in these beautiful ways. He understood, I think, and we both thank you."

She got up from the table, and again with the simplicity of a child knelt at her praying-table a moment. At that, one sudden pang of remorse came over him, but the thing was done; it was too late. Over that his mind was divided: part was sorry it was too late, but the more vital and essential part rejoiced and sang over that knowledge.

"I won't wait now," he said. "I know you like to be alone after the vision. It is good-bye, is it not?"

Ida looked at him inquiringly.

"No, no," she said. "You will come to see us: there will be nothing changed except that which we settled."

Then in a tone of extraordinary sweetness, "Why should I lose my friend?" she asked.

At that, remorse, honesty, pity, all stirred together in him, making a little swirl on the surface of his soul, like a rising fish.

"Yet perhaps it would have been better if we had never met," said he. "Great and dreadful anxiety and fear have been your lot owing to me."

"And joys transcending all else," said Ida gently.

He paused a moment.

"If you can assure me of that, I take back what I said."

"I do assure you," said she.

He held her hand as long as a stranger would hold it, or "so very little longer," and next moment the door closed behind him. That sound seemed to symbolize to Ida the closing of another door: with him there had passed away a chapter of her own life which had been extraordinarily beautiful to her. Short as it had been in the mere rough computation of minutes—for Henderson had been in England altogether barely a couple of months—the growth and the progress to the girl herself had been very wonderful; her spiritual life had shot up like an aloe-flower. No touch of evil, no want of faith in herself, she felt, had prompted the desire to get into closer communication with her father, and her experiences had been precious to her beyond all words. But they were over now, they had closed in a glory of sunset, and the door was shut, and somehow that was right too. Deep down in herself she felt she could not lead two lives so absorbing as the two she had been trying to reconcile: one life she had promised already to Jack, and it was his. Nothing could be clearer than the duty that love demanded.

There was another consideration also. For the last week the thought of Henderson himself had been with her, she knew now, almost every minute of the day; all this week he had been growing in her mind, till it seemed to her that all she heard or saw, all she did or thought, took place on the other side of a pane of coloured glass, as it were, which was he. It was through him, as a medium, that the impressions of the external world had lately been coming to her, even as also the visions of the spiritual world were hers through him. And though she trusted and liked him, she did not want this: there was only one man in the world, not he, who had the right, a right which she so willingly acknowledged, to be to her the interpreter of this world of weekdays and Sundays. But insensibly, through her dependence on Henderson in the matters that were hidden from Jack, with which he had refused to have anything to do, the influence of the former had spread far outside the limits of

his own sphere. Then suddenly a simile came into her mind which resembled this: she had upset an ink-bottle the other day over her blotting-book, and the black pool had come in like a tide, devouring the whiteness. It had spread through it all; there was not an inch that was not drenched and blackened, there was no stopping it; its touch devoured.

It was a great relief, she could not help confessing that, to know that this was over; for she made no doubt that, ceasing, as she was going to do, from all spiritual communications made through him, his general influence over her would disappear. But she saw that she would have firmly to deny herself in the future even the thought or the desire for the experiences which he had given her, if she was to get rid of it, for it was he who was so essentially knitted into them. Yes, they were over, her association with him was over, and no more, she hoped and trusted, would the voice of his love cry to her. She had asked him not to let it: she felt sure that he would spare her, for he knew now how hopeless it was, and would be man enough to suffer in silence, not crying to her.

It was already growing dusk, and she left the little white room, passed through her sitting-room, and went out into the passage to go downstairs. Just outside her room Abdul was seated on the floor, as was his wont, with his hands clasped round his knees. He got up as she came out, and stood, so it seemed to her, watching her with a sort of patient yet anxious intentness. All this last week, so she told herself, with a pang of newly-awakened contrition, she had hardly said a word to him—had scarcely remembered his existence. Yet all the week, she felt sure, he had been watching with those patient, loving eyes.

"What is it, Abdul?" she asked, smiling.

He looked at her with the same deep anxiety.

"Is all well with you?" he asked. "Only tell me that is so, and I will wait again. I will not vex you, beloved lady, or trouble you so long as all is well. You alone can know that, and if you tell me all is well, it is so."

The contrition struck more deeply, and she held out both hands to him.

"Yes, dear Abdul, dear, faithful Abdul," she said. "I

believe all is well. I have hardly seen you since we came to London."

Again the Arab smiled that patient, loving smile.

"No, you have many friends," he said, "and that is right. I am just the watch-dog, and let your enemies beware."

"The watch-dog may sleep, then," said she. "There is peace."

He shook his head.

"Yet he is unquiet," he said. "He sniffs the breeze: there is something abroad."

Ida frowned.

"You are not fair, Abdul," she said. "I know who you mean. Well, then, I am not going to see him again except publicly, openly, on such matters as all the world talk of."

"So it is as I thought," he said, his eye flashing, his instinctive hatred of Henderson burning like a beacon in it.

"Yes; but it is over," said she.

Again he shook his head.

"If I thought that, I would sleep," he said.





SEVENTEENTH

LEONARD COMPTON had been left by Jack a week ago with a problem to solve, and the longer he considered it, the more difficult and complicated it appeared. Briefly stated, it was this: Henderson had by some means, hypnotic or otherwise, acquired such power over Ida that he could produce in her, not apparently at stated times—at times, that is to say, when she expected it—but when he chose, the hallucination that he was calling her. Frankly, he did not like this: the power it implied was considerable, and there was no guarantee that it would not grow till it became portentous. Somehow or other, then, this power had to be broken, and some plan by which it could be broken was the solution of the problem. Also Henderson had acquired and was using this power clearly for some purpose. What was that purpose?

Now, Leonard never fell into the mistake of underrating either the fine qualities of his friends or the strength of his enemies, and though he would scarcely have felt himself justified in putting Henderson squarely down in the latter category, he would have allowed, at any rate, that in the case in point their interests were sufficiently antagonistic. Of Henderson's strength, then, he proposed to make an estimate which should not be ungenerous; he wanted to state to himself what force, so to speak, Henderson could put into the field in order to gain his object. The total, it must be confessed, when he passed it in review, rather appalled him. The figures on which he based it were these:

Henderson had discovered and brought to light, and had apparently at his call, a power of unfathomable and evil potency. A "master-word," the belief (and no doubt its demonstration) that the spirit of an ancient Egyptian, mysteriously raised from his sleep below the threshold, was his servant, had carried him unarmed, a detestable Englishman,

through tribes who were fierce and hostile. But such was the might of the spell he owned, their fierceness and hostility were cowed. He had dwelt among them in perfect security, and the fame of his magic had magically preceded him on his return, so that the natives of the villages left their work and turned out to see him. What was that master-word? Well Leonard knew, for even now the memory of that evening he had spent in the prosaic little flat in Davies Street was, when he thought of it, like vitriol poured upon the brain: it smoked with devouring pungency, it crept horribly inwards into the very fortress of sanity and actual existence, undermining its towers, till the creed which was incredible possessed the brain. From inside the safety of the circle which It could not cross he had with his own eyes beheld a dreadful leering, sensual face, mad with anger, it seemed, and lusting for evil deeds: through Henderson, as interpreter, he had spoken with It, and heard It recount with hellish glee the secrets of Its incorporeal life. It had asked, too, when "she" was coming again—the "she" whom for some reason It regarded as Its lawful prey, which had been unfairly snatched from It. But It waited for its prey as the crocodile waits at the ford of Indian rivers in sure and certain hope of the defenceless coming down to draw water.

The sight, the abhorrence of the spiritual atmosphere at the time, had sickened him, professed sceptic as he was in occult affairs, and he remembered how it was with nerves all on edge and flayed, and with dreadful qualms of dawning disbelief, that he had called suddenly for lights, as Hamlet's uncle called, unable to bear the veiled possibilities of darkness, which had been lightened only by the shimmering outlines of that incarnated evil. Then had followed the question which inference involuntarily drew: had the look of abandoned terror which he had seen once on Ida's face anything to do with this horror just now made manifest? And the affirmative had come. It was she, Ida, for whom It waited: she had once in some terrible way drawn near to It; a word from him would expose her to It again. Meantime Henderson had acquired this awful mysterious influence over her.

So now, when he reckoned up Henderson's assets, he had to add to the hypnotic power he possessed over her, which he used, and by which he called to her, this second dreadful

spell, as yet held in reserve. Then on that same evening there had followed a recital, almost more terrible yet, to which at the time he had pledged secrecy—how that in some oasis, the name of which he had forgotten, which Henderson arrived at still in the character of doctor, there had been talk for many days about magic. For days he, like a miser, hugging the secret knowledge of his wealth, had listened, and at the end had given an example of his own power. Henderson had warned the villagers what might happen: he did not then wholly know himself the terms he was on with this hellish familiar, and had drawn the magic circle into which he had advised all present to come. But three out of the crowd had laughed at him, and stayed outside, defying him as the magicians of Pharaoh defied Moses, to produce anything more than they could themselves imitate. Of these none looked again with sane eyes on the wholesome day. Something entered, and their mouths spoke no more of bread and meat and wine and the sun and the moon, but cackled for a day or two of things unseen and terrible. And before a week those three mouths neither spoke nor cackled any more at all.

That, perhaps, had impressed Leonard more than anything: Henderson, flicking the ash off his cigarette, deplored the accident indeed, but said, justly enough, it was their own fault; they had been rash, and in consequence of their rashness had died. They were outside the circle of safety when Set-nekht was abroad, and had simply not found it possible to live any longer. Then, in answer to a question, they had died of horror, he supposed. He was sorry they had not taken the ordinary precaution of making themselves safe; the advisability of doing so had been clearly presented by him, but they had not done so. And at that thought once more Leonard froze again with horror, for it was something connected with that, some tentacle reaching out from that hellish monster, which had produced on Ida's face the squinting eyes and the incarnate fear. Set-nekht in some way was responsible for that moment of quivering mouth and blind, shuddering terror; he had done that—that was his work. And he, and all that he did, was in the control of this dark man. At any moment, apparently, he could loose the eighth plague of Egypt.

For a whole day Leonard had pondered over the unreality

of the point at which he had logically arrived. A series of credible conclusions, so far as he could judge, led up to a conclusion which was nearly laughably incredible—a conclusion at which a man might reasonably snap his fingers. Did one suppose—it was this that the whole thing came to—that a man in the twentieth century could loose the spirit of one who had died twenty centuries before these began to be numbered, on a beautiful and innocent girl of to-day? A thousand times it was ridiculous, but in wakeful hours of a thundery night it was more possible. And though a hundred times he told himself that this was laughably incredible to a reasonable man, he neither laughed nor was able to disbelieve it. He himself had seen what he had seen, and he could not disbelieve his own senses. That spirit had been raised by Henderson; he could raise it again, he could make it put forth its power where he would. So, in estimating Henderson's possible strength, he could not leave this out.

At this for an hour he writhed in his chair. It could not be that God should allow it. Yet God allowed cancer and lupus, and let dreadful fevers, conveyed by mosquitoes which had drunk at wayside pools, enter into the body of a clean and healthy man. An Englishman went out to some fever-district full of noble ideals, full of health and potential usefulness and with the credit balance of a clean life. Yet a mosquito bit him, and where were his ideals and his cleanliness of life, and all the good deeds he might have done? A shivering thing, half a corpse already, was conveyed to the ship, and before the green shores of home were in sight the lead-laden hammock was committed to the deep. One was not more inexplicable than the other. Everything in Nature preyed on its fellows, and what if in the shrouded mysteries of the spirit-world the same order of things held? No one, at any rate, could affirm that it was not so, or bring proof to the matter.

Yet no man, he told himself, could be such a fiend as to employ this awful supernatural demon on a human being, and that a girl, innocent and defenceless. Yet once, somehow, Ida had been in its power, and who could have put her in its power unless it had been Henderson, to whom in some inscrutable way control over it was given? Once, at any rate, so Leonard, not knowing the true story of that night in March, was bound to conclude, he had let this devil

of darkness get hold of her, so that weeks afterwards the mere memory of it was sufficient to contort her face into an unrecognisable mask of herself. And if he had done it once, he might do it again. At the séance he had attended, Set-nekht had asked when She was coming again; he remembered her, he waited for her. Who was she but Ida?

Then the second source of strength in his enemy passed in panoply before him, and it, to his mind, was scarcely less to be dreaded. Henderson had some influence over the girl, hypnotic, mesmeric, already strongly established, so that she went to his rooms, in defiance of all convention, and could hear him call to her at a distance. What had Henderson's object been in establishing that? How and for what purpose did he intend to use it? For he was not a man without motive; he did not keep his razors sharp merely to let them repose in their cases.

This all looked black enough: yet perhaps he was on a wrong chain of inferences altogether. Ida, so Jack had told him, had said she owed a great debt to Henderson. He had delivered her from a mortal peril—from a danger that was darker than death. Was, then, the reverse of all he had been uneasily imagining the truth? Had Ida, in some other manner, independent of Henderson, come defenceless within the circle of this demon? and had he delivered her from it, bringing her, perhaps, as a necessary preliminary under his own hypnotic influence? For what, on any reasonable hypothesis, could this danger be, except the power of the demon, to which, as Henderson had told him, she had once been exposed? Yet even then, though this was sunlight to storm in comparison to his first hypothesis, he did not like it: he detested the idea that the influence of any should be paramount over another—it seemed to him an immoral state of things—and when it was the case of these two, it was doubly detestable.

Yet all these fears, whether justly or unjustly conceived, were in themselves fruitless, and only bred in himself fantastic and further terrors, probably groundless and certainly unnerving. He had, that situation so paralyzing to thinkers, to make a plan, the object of which was to do something. All his life he had spent in thinking, the object of which was theory; now, and without delay, something had to be done. Also it was shadows and ghosts against which he

was fighting, things the power and the nature of which he had no means of estimating. Jack Carbery, too, admirable if a man had to be knocked down, or any definite course followed involving muscle or primary action of the brain, was useless here—useless was Ida herself, while Mrs. Desmond, who would have laughed at the whole of his fantastic theorizing, was useless also.

One person (next he forced his mind into practical channels) was alone likely to be of avail. Yet he, Abdul, was so unarmed: his devotion to Ida, of course, was beyond all possibility of question, but the force and the enemy to be dealt with was no brain employed merely on abstruse subjects, and adept at that, but a brain that dictated the speeches of an orator, that wove and conceived, that had tact, finesse, and infinite patience and cunning, and at the same time was backed up, apparently, by these impalpable, undefined, but terribly potent allies. How else, indeed, could Henderson have established his influence over Ida, except by the most delicate and calculated handling? No: Abdul might be a powerful confederate for certain contingencies, but for the work of unweaving, unravelling, of finding out what was the actual and obscure state of affairs, he was no good. Then, with a mental slap in his own face, and a leap out of his chair at his own stupidity, the other possible man who could help flashed into sight. Like a spider in his web, Henderson sat in Davies Street; what if a second spider wove webs with him? What if eventually the two quarrelled over a fly, and Abdul, like a great bumble-bee, buzzed through the gossamer, upsetting both, maybe, but giving escape to the fly?

The sketch of this was instantaneous; it occurred only with the same validity as the numerous unfounded imaginations he had erected over what he feared. But as he looked at it more closely, it took form and solidity, and became at length a definite plan.

The practical upshot of it was that, on the evening of the day on which Ida had made her farewell to all that Henderson had admitted her to, Leonard Compton again entertained the latter to dinner. Leonard was awake to his every chance, and feeling all the time slightly ashamed, seeing that Henderson did not refuse sherry with his soup, plied him with wine with rather greater insistence than he would have

ordinarily employed. Yet his shame was superficial; in reality, he was ashamed of nothing that could help him to secure his end and render Henderson powerless. To say, of course, that Henderson was drunk, or anything near it, would be a gross misuse of language, but, quite naturally, he was rather more communicative after dinner to-night than he would have been if he had abstained, which was exactly Leonard's object. Wine, traditionally, "makes glad the heart of man"; and though his heart was scarcely made glad, it was made, at any rate, conscious of its emotions, and not unwilling to speak of them. He had no reason to regard Leonard as anything but a friend, and Leonard, on his side, told himself that he had as yet no reason to regard the other as an enemy. Yet the lists were set, so to speak, in the dining-room of the Bath Club; and had the other members known, they would have formed a ring round the little table for two in the centre of the room. For the duel, a duel of life and death, began that night, and though the passes were made without foils, thrust and parry had begun, and already a mistake on either side might be fatal to someone.

The conversation naturally enough turned on occult subjects, and Leonard asked several questions on the use of hypnotism to "unseal the inward eye." Henderson had devoted a good deal of his last lecture to this point, which was new to most English spiritualists, and had given rise to a good deal of discussion, and there was, thus, nothing in the least far-fetched in Leonard's referring to it, for he had attended the lecture, and had expressed, if not scepticism on the point, ignorance, at any rate, about it.

"The suggestion you made interested me very much," he said—"namely, that of putting one person in a séance into a hypnotic sleep, while the others remained conscious, and comparing their impressions of any phenomena that might occur. But what reason have you to suppose that spirit-communication through a medium will be more vivid to a person who is hypnotized than to one who is awake?"

Henderson looked at him quickly a moment, and emptied his glass of champagne. He was not suspicious that this inquiry had any particular bearing—indeed, nothing could have been more unlikely than that Leonard should know that Ida had been hypnotized by him—but he was at present on his guard.

"It seems to me a theory which is in itself very probable," he said. "A hypnotized person is, of course, far more sensitive to suggestion than one in normal consciousness. It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that the suggestions—for they are that really—that come from the spirit-world would be also more vividly perceived by one hypnotized."

"But would they not be overlaid, so to speak, by suggestions which might come—quite involuntarily, perhaps—from the person who has hypnotized the subject?"

"No, I don't see that," said the other; "such suggestions, I should guess, would take effect when the hypnotic sleep was over, if they took effect at all."

"Yet during the sleep two sets of suggestions are possibly being made," argued Leonard, "one coming, as you say, *viâ* the medium from the spirit-world, the other straight from the hypnotizer. Why should one take effect immediately, and not both?"

Henderson shrugged his shoulders.

"I can only say I have found it as I tell you," he said.

"Ah, then, you have tested your theory to some extent," said Leonard. "It would be good of you if you would tell me about it; for the idea is quite new to me, as I fancy it was to most of your audience."

"Yes, I have made a few experiments," said he, "and I have found that the subject when awake again is peculiarly susceptible to the influence of the hypnotizer—quite peculiarly so," he added. "Just as I said, the suggestions, even involuntarily made by the hypnotizer, take effect afterwards."

"And while hypnotized, you said the subject is very sensitive to the communications conveyed by the medium?"

"Yes," said Henderson, "also peculiarly so."

"Ha! that's very interesting," said Leonard. "It is a new point, is it not?"

"I found it recognised in my Egyptian wanderings," said the other. "But as regards England, I should say it was new. England, after all, is still at the ABC in these matters."

He paused a moment, considering, but his prudence saw no reason why he should not speak.

"It is rather annoying," he said; "the person with whom I have been experimenting has suddenly refused to sit with

me any more, and my experiments are left like a rope-end dangling in mid-air. However, my influence is already very considerable, and I think it highly probable that—that his refusal no longer is valid, so to speak, that all power of resistance is really gone.”

“Ah, there we touch on ethics,” remarked Leonard. “What a pity it is, from a scientific point of view, that one has to respect another person’s individuality, which, after all, is the most sacred thing on earth!”

He laughed, but he felt his heart sink suddenly into his boots, as he waited for Henderson’s reply. They had finished dinner, and the latter was leaning forward, elbows on the table, looking rather excited. His eyes gleamed, there was a touch of colour in his face, he looked extraordinarily alert.

“Yes, we touch on ethics indeed,” he said, “but the ethics go deeper than you suggest. True, one has no right to infringe on another’s individuality, but what if one cannot fulfil or complete one’s own except by so doing? One’s own individuality is also sacred, I take it. One has no right to starve or stint it. It is our first duty to develop it to its utmost and best. I am talking, you will understand, quite in the abstract.”

Again Leonard’s heart sank.

“Of course,” he said. “But how can one’s own individuality demand the rights of another, except in the way a vampire demands the life-blood?”

Henderson shook his head.

“We are all vampires, if you come to that,” he said; “and though it is an ugly word, I’m not afraid of it. We none of us have an independent existence. We all—horrible as it sounds—suck each other’s blood. You may call it vampirism, if you like, but how if you call it love? The individuality of the woman makes the individuality of the man complete, and of course *vice versâ*. Each singly is half himself. You will find the same idea expressed in the most exalted passages of the most respectable poets.”

Quick as he habitually was, Leonard had no reply for the moment: this new complication, that Henderson was in love with Ida, was so utterly unexpected. Yet it was so simple, so natural, that he could not think why it had not occurred to him before. Even Mrs. Desmond could have

helped him to it, had he known: she would not, as he supposed, have been altogether useless in unravelling this dreadful tangle.

"Ah! I call it vampirism, not love," he said, "because the essence of love is that both give. But vampirism takes from an unwilling victim. And to exercise one's power over one who can no longer resist seems to me alien to love."

Henderson's face was all on fire, and he opened his mouth to speak. Then, before words came, he checked himself, and Leonard felt sure that what he had said was not his original thought.

"Yes, I see your distinction," he said, "but I wonder whether in practical life love admits any arguments at all. Indeed, if one thinks of it, perhaps it would not be a bad definition of love if one called it the only thing in the world which admitted no arguments at all. Impossibilities, whether moral or physical, should not exist for love. 'Neither bolt nor bar will keep my own true love from me,' as that old song has it. That seems to me very true: and whether the bolts and bars are made of iron or of more ethical stuff does not matter."

"All is fair in love and war, you mean?" said Leonard. "That is certainly not true of war; you may not poison wells, or cut off water, or use explosive bullets. And it is the same with love, I think: you may not cut off the beloved's individuality; that is her running water."

Henderson's face suddenly softened.

"Yes, yes," he said. "While you say that, it seems to me true, and yet afterwards I shall begin to wonder again. And soon after that I shall not wonder at all, but believe that it is as I say."

"Ah, then send for me," said Leonard; "I will repeat it as often as you find it necessary."

There was a shade too much of personal interest in his voice, and it flashed through Henderson's mind that Leonard conceivably had some inkling of the state of affairs which had prompted this discussion. But to-night he was a little off his guard, and but gave the possibility a fleeting, wayside glance—it seemed so extremely unlikely. He laughed.

"No, I don't think you will continually find yourself being rung up by me," he said, "in order to discourse to me on the nature of the limitations of what is fair in love. But,

after all, what do you propose to do? Every man or woman who is strong exercises, whether he wills it or not, influence over his surroundings. All influence is hypnotic; you can water it down or give it neat: it is all one. Supposing you suggest to me now that there are certain points beyond which one should not go. Your suggestion has weight with me. I consider it: it infallibly must have its effect, however minute, on my mind. You can't put up the shutters against the influence of others: whatever you do, however hermit-like you live or however strong you are, you are influenced by others every moment of your life."

Leonard also leaned forward on the table.

"You don't mean you seriously contemplate enslaving the personality of another?" he asked.

All the little promptings of caution which had just faintly whispered in Henderson's ear were stilled at this. The subject interested him so enormously in an impersonal manner that he no longer paused to consider, or even cared, whether Leonard would make a practical or personal application of what he said.

"Ah, there is nothing that at times I don't contemplate," he said, his voice sinking into almost a whisper. "There are no dreams that ever visit my pillow so gigantic and monstrous as those which I indulge in soberly when I am quite awake. To think how blind man has been through all the ages, man who carries about within him the one conquerable force in the world—namely, will! I don't believe that any one man's will is stronger than any other's; it is only that one has more control over it than another, has grasped it more firmly, and uses it more vigorously. In some people, you can hardly call it a force at all; at least, it is a force utterly dormant. Others have got to know how to use it a little: we call them strong. But none of us ever have employed one-quarter of the force we really have. We none of us fully know what the force of it is; it is only by employing all we know of that we can bring more into action. To make your body stronger you have to exercise your muscles, such as they are, to the full: to make your will stronger you have to exercise it also to the full."

He paused a moment.

"And the power that lies within our grasp, if we could only grasp it!" he said. "I soberly believe there is no

miracle that each of us could not perform. Look at the Christian Scientists! With a little toy copy of this truth, a little mirror that catches just one ray of the blinding flood of sunlight which is there all the time if we could but see it—with this one ray, so to speak, they heal diseases: it is no use denying it. They have not a pennyworth of science between them, they know nothing of occult matters: they have done no mining in the soul, but on the very surface they have picked up a few grains of gold. But to reach the solid reef below: that is what each of us can do, if we will. Ah, that possibility of power which is really unlimited, that dazzles me. There is nothing I would not do to bring my will to full working order. What could one not compel! Love, happiness, all that is worth anything, would lie in one's hand, not only an absence of headaches and a freedom more or less complete from small nervous worries."

The theme seemed to intoxicate him, and the vivid, clear-cut sentences which really revealed himself flowed out like a spouting weir, far-darting with the weight of water behind them.

"Yet I know, too, how a miser feels," he went on. "I know well the ecstasy of self-denial, the consciousness of powers which one refuses to use. You sat with me once in Davies Street; you saw—well, you saw enough to convince you that I am, as they say, strongly backed up. Supposing I loosed *that* on the world? Did I tell you about the panic in the bazaar at Cairo? Yes? Well, the world would all be panic-stricken even as the bazaar was. Supposing I even loosed it, not on the world, but on one person, whose money, let us say, or whose love, I desired? Should not I get them, do you think?"

Leonard started back. The impression of that evening in Davies Street was, somewhere deep down in him, too horrible for contemplation: he had covered it up, but now Henderson was plucking off the coverings with deft, implacable touch, and the shrouded form of the horror was every moment growing more distinct in outline. The other noticed his start, and laughed.

"Ah, you need not be afraid," he said; "I am not a fiend, though really I believe you thought I was. I am only telling you what might be. And who knows? Perhaps, as

I suggest, it is only the motive that lies at the centre of the miser's instinct which prevents me. The miser will put up with squalor and rags for the sake of the sense of power which he chooses not to use. Perhaps it is as well that I share that passion with him. I am content to be obscure, to work for my daily bread, to live quietly and rather meanly. But what if I said, 'I will be a miser no longer; I will realize my assets'? It is so simple: I have but to put Mohammed to sleep, and in three minutes it will be by me, ready to do my bidding."

Leonard had been listening with a sort of fascinated horror, but at this, common-sense—or so he would have called it—came to his aid. Here were he and his companion seated in a modern club in an ordinary West End street in that mercantile town of London. Patient waiters in prosaic livery, some yawning discreetly behind their hands, some talking low in the corner, were standing about till they should leave the room from which all the other diners had long ago departed: the steward was by his desk with the bill ready, talking in undertones to the chef: on the table lay the menu of which they had just eaten, with its reassuringly material list of dishes; the smoke of crisp-smelling cigarettes curled in the air; the hum of London droned outside. Yet he, Leonard Compton, was listening with a heart that quaked, and a forehead on which cold beads of perspiration gathered, to the suggestion of the possibilities that would ensue supposing the spirit of a man who had been nearly four thousand years in his tomb was let loose on the world. In the obvious blatant absurdity of such a notion, his minor fears also were flooded with the same daylight of common-sense. What if Henderson had hypnotized Ida? How on earth could this justify any uneasiness on his part? What could the man do? They were in Dover Street: Ida was in Berkeley Square: the town was London, the country was England, the date was nineteen hundred and four.

He threw his napkin on the table, and nodded to the waiter to bring the bill, fingering the coins in his pocket, and telling himself they were round, and hard, and real.

"My dear fellow," he said, "you are a conjuror. Your dreams, which I allow, too, are far more vivid than any which have ever visited my pillow, have infected me. You really almost gave me the nightmare, a thing to which I

always object, especially if it comes by day, for it seems more real then."

A rather ugly look came into Henderson's eyes.

"I only talked of the nightmare," he said. "Come round to Davies Street if you like, and renew your acquaintance with it."

Evidently the nightmare was not quite over in Leonard's mind, for he started up with a somewhat uncontrolled movement.

"No, no," he cried. "Come, shall we move across to my rooms? We have been keeping everybody waiting."

Henderson looked at him quietly a moment, with, perhaps, a shade of contempt in his mind, for it was quite clear that his host had been rather frightened, a feeling to which he was himself a stranger, and with which, consequently, he had little sympathy.

"By all means!" said he.

The rest of the evening, the second act, the second part of the duel, opened quietly enough in Leonard's rooms. He had a copy of the Cerigo bronze just arrived from Athens, and Henderson betrayed an artistic eye in his appreciation of it. Then, from the consideration of muscles it was but a short step to nervess, and Leonard, surrounded by his medical library of fat, respectable volumes standing in their book-cases, resembling so closely, to the imaginative mind, professors and practitioners in their broughams, felt himself escape for the moment from quicksands. But from nerves it was but a short way back to psychical subjects, and they soon drifted again in that direction.

"Of course there is no limit," he was saying, "to the influences of the mind over the body. Nor, naturally, is there any limit to the influence of A's mind over B's body. The thing follows as a corollary. If one man can control the feelings of his body, so also can another man, if he understands him. For instance, I can give bread-pills to a patient, having told him distinctly that he is taking a nerve tonic. He swallows them as a nerve tonic, and tells me with rapture a week afterwards that they have done him no end of good. That he is better is beyond all doubt, but what has done him good is my suggestion that these innocuous pieces of dough would help him. That is quite sufficient: I can, if he trusts me as a doctor, make him believe that I am curing him.

The result is the same, for he cures himself. I have injected plain water, having told a patient that it was morphia, and he has slept, in spite of great pain."

Leonard sat down, feeling that for as long as he could he would steer the ship clear of the quicksands of occultism.

"And there was this of interest, too," he said, "that one particular patient to whom I administered plain water was used to morphia, and the effect was that he awoke with a morphia mouth. Definite effects, that is to say, had been produced on his mucous membrane by the belief that he had taken morphia. He had not, but his body conformed to his belief, and his mucous membrane was affected in a way that could not have occurred unless he had taken morphia. But it was only water!"

Henderson was looking at him with a kind, encouraging sort of smile, the sort of smile that a grown-up person may give a child who has really discovered the amazing fact that "a-b" makes "ab," and produces this astounding discovery as something really enlightening.

"Yes, yes, of course that would be so," he said, as the child looked up for approval.

"Well?" asked Leonard.

"This. A's mind can, of course, act as you have stated on B's body. How much more directly, then, can A's mind act on B's mind, if A has any idea how to use his mind? That certainly must be so. A's body can act on B's body quite simply and directly; he can hit him. A's mind can also as directly hit B's mind: it can knock it down, put it in chancery, and, as I said before, it can hold it in such a position that B has no power of resistance. Yet you object to that. It is only a question of degree: we all employ influence or hypnotism over others every day of our lives. But, as I said before, your hypnotism may be either neat or watered down: it is merely a question of degree. Yes, thanks, I think I will have a whisky and soda, not neat at all, but very much watered down. Yes, please, quite to the top."

Henderson took a long drink before he spoke again. There was always a sort of restrained violence both in his movements and his voice, and now, as he walked up and down the room, glass in hand, Leonard found himself irresistibly reminded of some prowling beast of prey, which

found its cage far too narrow for its roaming propensities. And it was a beast of prey that spoke.

"I want so much," he said, "and if all was given me I should still say 'more.' One's desires, one's imaginations, so far outstrip all that exists. I want knowledge, knowledge, knowledge. I want the power that comes with knowledge. There is no position in the world that I would accept if I had to stop there, and could not go further. And I don't think I care at all at what cost I get it: my own life and blood, or the life-blood of another, I am really quite indifferent which it is to be. But I do not recognise that anybody has any rights with regard to what I want. Nor have I rights: another stronger than me may come along and beat me. I shan't complain."

Then he looked Leonard straight in the face.

"And when I want anything enough," he said, "I get it. The two things are practically synonymous. One only has to want enough. That is a function, again, of the will. Most people want so very feebly."

There was very little consoling here; the hard outlines of the man as sketched by himself were more horrible than all the lurid imaginings of Leonard. He had imagined a vague sort of bogie, claws and hoofs and fiery eyes, but this hungry, eager man was far more alarming, for he so emphatically belonged to practical life. Then Henderson finished his glass with a couple of gulps, and proceeded to complete his sketch with light and shadow.

"And if that was only all!" he said—"if only one's whole nature was taken up with the desire for knowledge and power! But within us all there is the imperishable child, on which depends our heaven and hell. And when the man is tired and has to rest, then the child awakes, and it cries for playthings, it cries for happiness and for love. Heavens! how it cries! It won't stop. You may offer it gold, you may offer it knowledge that would have made Solomon's mouth to water, but it pushes them aside and just points to the moon. Nothing will do but the moon. And its crying interrupts the man so that he has to contrive to get the moon somehow, cast a noose round it, draw it to earth, charm it, will it to come down. Not till then will the child cease crying. Oh, the moon, the moon—that beautiful moon which so entirely defies imitation. No copy of it is

any good: the poor child knows directly that it is not the real one."

There was something frightfully sinister about this: but there was also something indescribably pathetic, and in spite of his rooted antagonism to Henderson, his firm resolve to fight him to the death, Leonard could not help being sorry for him. He was suffering so much; he brought all the strength of his nature to bleed on the altar. He was altogether fiery-coloured; the same intensity that inspired his aims inspired his emotions: He was in love with all his might, he "wanted" so keenly. It was this very intensity, too, which had made him speak so freely; it would have been clear to any that the man was in love, and that his love did not run smooth. But that Leonard should know that, he did not care: earlier in the evening he had settled that the possibility of his knowing that the moon was Ida was too remote to be considered; also he had spoken of the person who would not continue the experiments as a man. There again, too, nothing could be more improbable than that Ida should have spoken to anyone of her secret visits to his flat. The whole point was that they should be secret.

Leonard jumped up briskly, with a very frank manner.

"My dear fellow," he said, "you're in love. I congratulate you most heartily. I know of no condition so excruciatingly delightful. I hope"—and his words were two-edged—"I most sincerely hope all will go well."

Henderson had sat down at the end of his speech in a very low arm-chair, but on Leonard's rising he got up and stretched himself, and again the recollection of a wild beast stretching itself came into Leonard's mind.

"Thanks," he said; "it is quite sure to go well. As I said, one has to contrive to get the moon. And the moon, one may always remember, is comparatively close to the earth. Now I must go to bed. I owe you an apology too. I have jawed this evening; I have maundered; I have cackled like an old hen with one egg, that thinks the news must be of engrossing interest to the whole world. And you have been a most finished listener, for I am certain you must have been bored, and you have managed to conceal the fact completely."

"I assure you I have not been bored," said the other with really pedantic truthfulness. "Must you really go?"

So Henderson took his departure, but Leonard did not at once go to bed. He sat in front of the dying fire, where ashes crinkled and coals collapsed, revising his imaginings in the light of Henderson's self-revelation. Not much revision was necessary: for though he no longer believed that it was Henderson who had loosed Set-nekht on Ida, yet he knew that he might conceivably do so. Though Henderson had denied it, it was clear that the idea had been in his mind as a possible one, and so the worst that Leonard had foreboded he felt sure was terribly correct. Then he reviewed his forces. There was Ida, who with all the will that was left her struggled for her own liberty; there was Jack, for whose sake she struggled; there was himself, who, though he perhaps had nothing more, was possessed of the enemy's general schemes, though not perhaps of the practical working of his campaign. Finally, there was Abdul, who must be called up. Leonard must tell him all he guessed or knew, and all that Abdul's knowledge of things occult was worth was for certain at the service of his beloved mistress.

"And God knows we shall need it all," said Leonard to himself.

He passed a night that was a logical sequence to the evening, a night of dreadful dozing horrors, of dreadful sharp awakenings to fears more definite but not less terrible. Towards morning, however, he slept dreamlessly, and was awakened from far-away unconsciousness by his servant drawing the curtains. He had, according to custom also, brought him his post. Topmost of his letters was one addressed in the handwriting of Jack. This, with a sudden qualm of misgiving, he tore open.

"DEAR LEONARD,

"Ida last night expressed a wish to leave London, and go down for a week into the country. So we are off this morning, for I am going with them. I can't tell you how relieved I am: I want her so to get away from this neighbourhood. She's looking awfully tired, and I don't think Mrs. D. is quite happy about her.

"Let me know if anything occurs, and thanks awfully.

"Yours,

"JACK."

"P.S.—I fully believe my own nerves were largely responsible for the exhibition I made of myself the other day, but until then I really didn't know I had any. Anyhow, I am much happier about it all now. We were like children frightening ourselves by making faces in front of the glass."

It was but a moment's work to read this, and Leonard's heart was still thumping with the fearful expectation of what it might contain when he had finished.

"Best thing that could happen," he said.

Then his satisfaction died.

"But how can I tell Abdul?" he thought. "I can't write it all to him. I must wait till they come back, I suppose."

Somehow this did not please him. He would have preferred to tell the Arab at once. Yet as long as they were all in the country and Henderson in London, he felt that danger was somehow not so imminent as when but a few hundred yards lay between the two houses. Besides, Jack and Abdul were with her. She was in excellent hands, while if anything ever so faintly disquieting occurred Jack would be certain to tell him.





EIGHTEENTH

SPRING came early this year, and the last week of February was full of warm suns and westerly winds, and promise of the ever-returning miracle of the fertility of the fruitful earth. The weather-wise, among whom was Mrs. Desmond, shook their heads, and prophesied terrible things of March, which, according to them, was likely to be a month of frosts and storms which would wreck young growth that had been coaxed into premature appearance, and nip the early blossom of the year. But in spite of this unsatisfactory outlook for the future it was impossible not to be entranced with the present, so full of tremulous beauty was this early awakening of spring. Spring, too, so felt Mrs. Desmond as she sat out—actually sat out—on the southerly-facing terrace of the house at Ryssop, was around her in ways more metaphysical. Just now it was divine, yet she wondered, with a certain foreboding of evil which was altogether foreign to her usually very placid and optimistic nature, whether here, too, storms and a return of nipping winter lay between now and summer, between now and that mating-time, which was fixed for April, or between now and June, the month of nightingales.

They—she, Ida, and Jack—had been down here for three days, three days of real spring, of warm cloudless skies and cloudless serenity, and a blaze of golden sun. Ida this afternoon had suddenly been overcome by a dreadful sense of duties unperformed, and had driven off alone after lunch, during which bitter scenes of recrimination had taken place, to return calls of a congratulatory nature which had accumulated. The recriminations were due to Jack's inflexible refusal to accompany her on these overdue errands unless he might be permitted to remain outside while she went in, and Mrs. Desmond had supported him.

"Dear Ida," she had said, "these calls are of the nature of ordering dinner. Jack will not in the future come into the kitchen with you for that; that is our part, we poor household drudges, and, indeed, in this sort of matter a man, I assure you, is in the way. This afternoon, for instance, you can get through what you have to do really much better without him. He will only look awkward, and make you feel so. So if duty really beckons, go by yourself, and leave Jack with me."

Ida had expressed herself quite clearly on this subject, but without effect. In consequence she had driven off alone, and just now Mrs. Desmond was waiting for Jack to come out. Her active support of his views on the calling question was not wholly ingenuous, since she very much wanted to have a talk with him. Before long he came out.

"You behaved nobly at lunch, Aunt Julia," he said. "But for you I should have yielded, and looked awkward, as you said."

"It wasn't noble," said she; "it was a mass of ulterior motive. I wanted to talk to you privately. Sit down."

There must have been some current of thought running in Jack's mind, which was alive to the vague forebodings which were in Mrs. Desmond's, for he looked up at her quickly.

"Nothing wrong?" he asked.

This was somehow rather disconcerting to Mrs. Desmond. She would have wished that it had not been in his mind.

"Ah, why do you say that?" she asked.

He sat down on the chair she had indicated.

"I don't quite know. Anyhow, tell me what you want to talk about. At least you needn't. Of course it is Ida."

Mrs. Desmond drew her chair a little closer to his.

"Yes, Ida, of course," she said. "Now, since we have come into the country Ida seems to me to have been absolutely normal and happy. It is because she is that that I realize how very abnormal, and really how very far from happy, she was before we left London. I can hardly tell you in what way, for impressions of this sort, though they are unmistakable, are so difficult of definition. But she seemed to me always to be listening for something, and often to be hearing what she listened for. Now, does that convey anything to you? Did you notice anything akin to

that? Or do I seem to you to be talking pure nonsense? I'm sure I hope so."

Jack moved in his chair rather uneasily.

"It's odd you should mention that," he said, "because about a week ago—rather more—I was talking to her, and twice she thought somebody had called her—called her by name, I mean."

Mrs. Desmond nodded.

"Somebody has been calling her all this last week," she said, "until we came down here. Now, who called? What was it?"

Jack's kind, genial face changed somewhat. A sort of fighting look came into his eyes, and it would have seemed to any prudent man at that moment far more comfortable to have him for a friend than an enemy.

"Henderson's been calling her," he said rather abruptly. "I'll see to it."

Mrs. Desmond turned to him quickly.

"Ah, take care," she said. "Don't do anything rash, for Heaven's sake! Somehow I fear that man."

"I don't," remarked Jack.

"No, because you don't know. Also I am sorry for him."

"Sorry for him, when he allowed her to go alone again and again——"

He stopped abruptly; he had not intended to say that, but it came out before he could stop it. Yet perhaps, after all, it was better Mrs. Desmond should know, and he was not sorry when she prompted him to continue.

"To go alone?" she suggested.

"Yes. I had forgotten you did not know, but I will tell you. She went several times alone to Henderson's flat."

Mrs. Desmond moved quickly in her basket-chair, so that it creaked.

"She is such a child," he went on. "I love her for that white innocence. And in proportion I hate him for allowing it: he must have known how impossible it was. She went for some infernal séance, and he has been hypnotizing her. He has got influence over her—she acknowledges that; she said, too, she owed him an enormous debt of gratitude. But she promised she would let his influence get no deeper. Also she knows him well, and I am sure trusts him. I hope she is right, even though if she is right I am utterly wrong.

But Ida has as much judgment of character as a cow, the darling! She thinks everybody is as good as herself."

Mrs. Desmond was silent a moment.

"As she has not told me," she said at length, "I don't officially know that, Jack. Perhaps, again, I have news for you, for she probably has not told you that he proposed to her about a month ago. She did not tell me that, either, by the way, but he did."

This was news to Jack, and he considered it.

"Poor chap!" he said. "I don't wonder, then, that he calls to her, though he has no more right to do it than he has to let her go and see him. But if he loves her, I suppose I ought to shake hands with him over that; but, to tell you the truth, I don't think I could shake hands with him over anything."

Then the ordinary, material, straightforward view of the world which he habitually took was shaken as by an earthquake, as the strange nature of the call came into his mind.

"What does it mean?" he said. "How does he do it? Every hour of the day I call to Ida, and she does not know; yet this man makes himself heard by her in some awful inward mysterious manner. What am I to do? Shall I tell him that, if ever he lifts up his beastly voice again, I'll thrash him?"

Mrs. Desmond had a great affection for this wholesome, straightforward young man, who was so very primitive and elementary in his suggestions. The very absence of scheming, of finesse, in him was delightful to her, for his blood beat so firmly, so full, without trying, so to speak, to run up secret out-of-the-way channels. He was not in the least a fool, but his simplicity almost rivalled Ida's, and, in parenthesis, she almost laughed to think how their servants would tyrannize over the arrangements of the house. But the parenthetical laughter was short, and, with a sort of regretful sigh for the time when differences of opinion were adjusted by this practical question of who could hit the shrewdest blows, she returned to the case, which could not be settled in this very simple manner.

"No, I'm afraid neither the threat nor the thrashing will do any good, Jack," she said, "and, indeed, I don't believe either need be ever desirable. Well, we have said all the ugly things—all the things that neither you nor I like. He

has, as you say, some infernal influence over her. But she has promised you that shall not go deeper. Now let us look on the other side. We have been here three days, and Ida has been like a new creature. The influence, whatever it is—I hate the thought of influences, by the way—seems to have been cut off. She has been all the time her best, her most natural self. We neither of us like Mr. Henderson, but, as far as we know, we have no right to suppose he would ever act in a way that you and I would call unfair. Nobody has called to her—whatever that means—since we left town. Let us think of that only: something that was constantly haunting her has ceased for the present to haunt her. Dear Ida, as we both know, likes horrors; she manufactures them for herself. In fact, I shouldn't the least wonder, if it was she alone, by some exercise of her horror-making faculties, thought she was being called, quite independently of him. But don't let us think of horrors any more, for apparently she is not thinking of them."

Mrs. Desmond got up and looked out over the sun-flooded landscape, which seemed a visible sign and incarnation of peace and security.

"How often we disquiet ourselves in vain!" she said; "and it is so rankly stupid to be vaguely afraid just in case there is anything to be afraid of. For three days now there has been no cloud of any sort over Ida, and I at least have been imagining future clouds just because the present is so cloudless. In the same way I have been imagining frosts in March because February is so warm. Let us cease doing that, and, to show how much in earnest I am, I shall devote the rest of this afternoon to bedding out. I regard it as a propitiatory offering for my want of faith. It is sheer madness, you see, to bed out in February, but I want to show that I am ashamed of forecasting spiritual frosts and storms, in some material manner."

She turned to him again from the sunny brooding landscape.

"Come, Jack," she said, "you and I have been building our fears together, as children build houses out of wooden brick. But one touch of the hand, down it all goes, clatter, clatter. My dear boy, push yours down too, as I have done, and never look back again to what has been. Look forward always, and God knows, my dear, your future could not

promise more happily. She is a pearl beyond price. And she loves you. What fairer fate could a man conceive than that which is prepared for you? There are not many Idas, dear, in this imperfect world of ours."

No dreamer of dreams, no solitary dyspeptic imaginer, could have resisted the buoyancy of her appeal. And Jack was neither, and he responded full-voiced and with all his heart.

"Yes, you are right," he said, "and if in the past we have imagined clouds, the sky is fair now. For my part, I shall imagine no more. I shall take"—and his voice trembled a little—"I shall take the perfect exquisite present, which is ours—Ida's and mine—and think only of the future, which shall be ours also. There have been clouds, but——"

Here she cut him short.

"But we made some of them," she said, "and, for all we know, we may have made them all. They are not worth another word. And let us be quite sure that we shall have no more of our own making, Jack. I solemnly believe that we have imagined the greater part of them. Now, have you any last word to say before we dismiss from our minds the whole of what has seemed to us cloudy in the past?"

He looked at her with absolute candour.

"No, not one," he said.

"Nor I," said she. "But if out of your great happiness you can spare a little kindness, a little sympathy, dear, for a man who has been very miserable where you have been very happy, it will not be wasted. Kindliness, gentleness, Jack, are never fruitless. The sixtyfold and the hundredfold are their crop. And the best of it is that the hundredfold is paid in two ways: once it comes back to us; once also it is paid to those towards whom we have felt the kindly impulse. It blesses both. So don't even wish that you could go and have a turn-up with Mr. Henderson."

They sat in silence a moment. Then she spoke again.

"So, as Abdul says—he told me the Arabic proverb the other day—'A sponge to wipe out the past, a rose to make the present fragrant, and a kiss to salute the future.' We agree on that. Do you know, I like Abdul."

Jack responded to this also.

"Ah, there is a heart of gold," he said; "and I used to hate black men. How I know he has a heart of gold I

couldn't tell you, but somehow I am certain of it. But when I've got the nightmare, give me Abdul's hand to hold."

"Just what I feel. And to think that I used to allude to him as a nigger! So if anything turns up—ah, I forgot, there is a sponge for the past."

"Yes, quite wet," said he. "Out it all goes."

Ida had chosen her afternoon of amendment for the things she ought to have done, with luck so good that it seemed almost as if she must have had intention in the matter. For this brilliant afternoon would have lured a mole into the sunlight and open air, and she found that not one of the objects of her visits was at home, so that Jack might just as well have taken a drive with her as not. Yet in certain ways, delightful though his presence would have been to her, and much as she had insisted on it at lunch, she was not sorry now to be alone, for she too, no less than the others, had things to think over. Yet they were scarcely that, even: it seemed to her, as she drove along the sun-flooded lanes, that all that was possible was to be, like these very lanes, sun-flooded. Until the voice, that for a week had called to her, had been stilled, she had scarcely known what a darkness that voice had cast over her, or out of how dense a cloud it had come. It had been like passing through a tunnel; the whole of her environment, roof, sides, and floor, echoed with it: she herself echoed with it: it had been all-pervading in its ringing resonance. Then, about a week ago, she had had that strange interview with Henderson—an interview arranged, though not consciously by herself, in that note she had sent to him, without ever really knowing how she had done it. A few days afterwards they had left London, she and her aunt and her lover, and it seemed to her as if she had passed out of the dark, resonant tunnel, and was speeding along between green meadow-lands and pleasant parks. Something, too, beside the crying voice had been left behind: she no longer climbed the glacier-stair. She had been allowed, so it seemed to her, to loiter for a little, anyhow, in the happy valley which she had looked at with such envy. The sublimities of the sunrises and moon-settings were gone from her, but gone, too, were the murmurings from unseen

crevasses, the crash in the blue caves of ice, the myriad dangers that beset her on her steep and narrow way. It might be a lower path that she had chosen, yet in the experience of the daughters of Eve there was nothing finer than the fate she had made hers to the exclusion of the dangerous way. A man whom she loved—she knew that—loved her. Another, Abdul, could bring her, not so fully, but still in very beautiful ways, into touch with those spiritual things which were as integral a part of her life as bread and wine. This was hers—all of this was hers.

Yet there had been—there no longer was—a choice, and the choice that she had made she endorsed this afternoon, not only willingly, but with almost rapture. In that which she had rejected, the fuller vision, she saw nothing that could be certainly put down as not right, but the conditions under which it was granted to her were impossible for her to accept. She could not take all that Henderson offered and give nothing in exchange. Could she have given him her love, had not that been pledged beyond all power or possibility of redemption to another, she would have given it. But it was no longer hers: her power of love had passed absolutely into the keeping of another. And in Henderson's offer there was a clause of reservation: each time she was granted the open vision she became, as she quite well knew, more under his control, and thus she had classed the two together, as they were most certainly to be classed, and rejected both.

Thus, by coincidence no doubt, but almost simultaneously, since her conclusion was arrived at as she triumphantly swept out of the carriage-drive of the third "not-at-home," she got to the same point as that which Aunt Julia and Jack had won their way to. All this was past; there was a great deal past that was dear to her, terribly dear to her, but past, too, was all that was terribly dangerous. And on things dangerous and dear alike she shut the door, locked it for her part, and threw the key away. Last March—the March which was so soon to come round again in the beneficent wheel of the year—that was dead; dead, too, was Henderson's love for her: dead was his terrible crying to her. A sponge had gone over it all, dear and bitter alike. No more, so she said to herself—no more conceivably, on this side of the narrow stream that separates living men

and women from those who truly live, would she hold that doubtful—or so it appeared to be now—but that close and intimate intercourse with her father. No more, too, would Henderson's hopeless love, made audible to her inner and vital self, cry to her; no more, above all, would haunt her that possession which in her waking moments was as dim to her as the sea through the mist of winter mornings—that Something that had stood in the temple of Mut, for that was now in the control of a man who loved her. It was his love, indeed, that rendered truly impossible any possibility of its recrudescence. From that she was sheltered as securely by Henderson's love as she was sheltered from Henderson himself by her love for Jack.

Oh, this limitless golden afternoon, which stretched east, west, north, and south, from horizon to horizon! The purr of growth was almost audible in trees and grass, so rapid was the sudden upspringing of life that this week of warm sun had called forth. Winter, with its storms and squalls and dark, uncertain days, was over, and though as yet the trees stood bare and leafless, the stir of the yearly forces of this renewal of life had begun, and she fancied that if she laid her ear to a tree, as in childish days she had laid it to a telegraph-post to listen for the humming of the tense wires, she would assuredly hear the rush and riot of the upward-flowing sap. Last week the snowdrops in the park, pale heralds of the spring flowers, had whispered of what was coming, and to-day in sheltered places the great frugal hymn of life was taken up by primroses that lurked in shady hollows and put up confident pale faces to the sky, and by violets, less bold, that nestled among their leaves, not venturing to raise their heads like their more courageous sisters. And the tide that was beginning to flow again through the world flowed through her also, the squalls and tempests through which she had passed were stilled, and inside as well as outside a warm, germinating wind blew, laden and flooded with sun, bearing light to dark places, and illuminating all with genial beams. The year had turned: for shortened and dark days the lengthening of the lights had begun; for storm and cold, soft air and this broad effulgence of sunshine were poured abroad, as universal and as all-embracing as love itself. Over the great open upland of the forest, on the ridge of which her way lay, that golden

haze lay sparkling, and the warm wind bore with it the aromatic smell of the pine-woods to her left and the good, moist, rooty smell of the dusky heather. Far away to the south rose the long lines of the Brighton Downs against the sky, and it seemed as if they had been made out of sky itself, which had been folded double, producing a darker shade, indeed, of blue, but one not less ethereal or luminous. Here and there across the dome overhead moved white fleeces of clouds—flocks of sheep, she told herself, that pastured there, shepherded by the sun—and their shadows, transparent ultramarine, moved across the heath below. Gorse was in flower, too (a fact Aunt Julia had already communicated to the *Gardener*) making a separate sunshine of its own, and as the carriage passed a bank of it the honey-sweet odour was wafted like a web of scent across the road. Then, from a coppice near at hand, a thrush suddenly sang a liquid, repeated phrase, and to Ida that seemed to crown the whole, to put into one liquid melody the whole spirit of Spring. She was happy, and her happiness was complete and unreserved: just now, had the wishing-cap been put into her hand, she would have dropped it by the roadside, having no use for it. She did not wish anything different, nor would she even have put the year on a week or a month, so as to bring closer that day of union with her lover. It was approaching, and as day after day went by she knew that she was becoming more fit for the consummation. Everything was moving in time together; all would be ready together.

For a little the very solemnity of her happiness made her grave, but soon the smile uncurled her lips again and brightened once more in her eyes, for, as the carriage turned in at the gate, she saw a figure she knew waiting for her, and without stopping the trotting horses she sprang out.

"Ah, Jack, Jack!" she cried—and the name even was all and more than enough—"I have been having a beautiful time, and you are divinely punctual to my needs. I wanted you just this very moment, neither before nor after. I wanted you now, and here you are!"

The victoria, at a signal from the girl, drove on again, and they were left alone.

"I am rather hurt," he said. "You should have wanted me before."

Yet he was not hurt, and his voice said so: he only played at damage.

"No, not a moment before, but now this minute," said she. "I have been adding things up, Jack: I have been looking back and looking forward, and I have come to a conclusion."

"What is that?" he asked, still talking like a child to a child.

"That it is all perfect. I would alter nothing. The winter has passed, but I would not have gone without winter. Oh, look round, and is it not past? I would not wish away a single squall, a single dark hour, for it was in darkness and in storm that the spring had to be born. It is really so. I think all things that are worth having spring out of those that one would have wished away. Don't you feel it as I do?"

He took her hands in his.

"I must feel as you do," he said. "I can't feel otherwise. And, indeed, what you say is curiously like what Aunt Julia and I have been saying. We, too, have been saying that the past, the winter is over, and whatever clouds there have been are gone. Oh, Ida, my spring!"

They stood together for a moment in silence, by the grave so to speak, of the past. There was no need, nor had either of them any desire to discuss it, to define more accurately what the past signified to each of them, what exactly each meant by it; for both knew that its outlines, though vague and shadowy, contained the same presence, the same spirit, the same shadows that the sun had illuminated and dispersed. To-day, at any rate, they no longer came into practical life. They were a station at which the train had not stopped: it was now behind them on the line. And that moment's silence was the committal of all that was past to the ground. Then Ida spoke its requiescat.

"Mr. Henderson has been very good to me," she said; "we must not forget that, Jack. I can't tell you how, and you don't want to know."

"No, dear, I don't want to," was his "Amen" to the requiescat.

Horticulturally speaking, that afternoon Mrs. Desmond ought to have been arraigned for murder and sudden death,

and even by a clement jury quite certainly condemned. The propitiatory offering for her want of faith, at any rate, was of the most lavish order, and she spared not the best and choicest. For, on a February afternoon, and with a March of which she had spoken in terms of such deep distrust to follow on her iniquitous deeds, she planted out a dozen sweet verbenas, three plumbagos, and half a bed of begonias. Already she trembled inwardly at what she had done before even the massacre of the innocents was really beyond recall, but outwardly her firmness never faltered, and Tom, the gardener with whom she had previously been so firm on the subject of fresh air, half wondered whether she would tell him to move all the orchids outside, too. She tried until the arrival of the others to talk herself into the confidence she did not feel, violating at the same time the most elementary and the most sacred principles of gardening.

"We all coddle ourselves and our plants far too much, Tom," she was saying, as, with a sense of madness, she tapped a plumbago out of its pot. "Look at your wife, now: why, she's a different woman since I told her about open windows. These plumbagos, too, I am convinced they will do better out. No, I think not that one: put that back in the greenhouse, it is such an exceptionally fine plant—and supposing there did happen to be a frost, which I am sure there won't! But this particular one—it won't be hurt by a little less air than the others. Yes, quite so!"

This was feeble, and she knew it, but really the propitiatory sacrifice must have its limits. As it was, she felt as if she had arranged a slaughter which was dreadfully unjustifiable, and Tom's alacrity in carrying back the particularly fine specimen of plumbago was not encouraging. But any further murderous schemes with regard to plants, though, like the Queen of Sheba, she had no more spirit left in her, were cut short by the arrival of Ida and Jack. The girl looked with a sort of incredulous horror at the begonias: though she was no gardener, her aunt's proceedings were almost incredible.

"Dear Aunt Julia," she said, "what are you doing? You said only yesterday that we were certain to have frosts in March. And begonias after frost—well, they no longer exist. It is like the almug-trees: there are no such begonias."

"No, dear, but we are going to have no more frost. Jack and I settled that after lunch to-day, so don't unsettle me."

This was clearly a parable, backed by a material instance, and Ida took it as such.

"And I settled the same thing too," said she. "I settled that all the different sorts of winter were over. Do you mean all sorts of winter, too, Aunt Julia?"

The sun was near its setting, and a flood of ruddy gold light shone full on Ida's face. Never, so thought Mrs. Desmond, had she looked so divinely beautiful: her pale, delicate skin was flushed with the rose-colour: her hat in its usual place in her hand, not on her head, let the sun shine through her great coils of golden hair, making them look as if they were in themselves luminous, an aureole of molten gold. And in her eyes there shone a happiness that was more radiant than even this glory of evening: love burned there, and a happiness that was content, and asked nothing more except that which the sure and certain promise of her love brought and would bring. The past, whatever was there of night, was dead; the future, whatever was there of day, was alive. The moment was perfect.

Mrs. Desmond, as she looked at her, with Jack standing by her, quiet and strong, an emblem and embodiment of security, felt her eyes suddenly grow a little dim with tears. She had scarcely known before how keenly she desired security in Ida's happiness, and how little secure she had hitherto felt it to be. But now it seemed to her that a boat which had been driving through wild waves and breaking surges had come into port, safe at last from the menaces of surges and terrors of squalls. A thousand mysterious perils of the sea had surrounded it, only dimly understood by her, but none the less dangerous. Hardly a day had passed, certainly, since Mr. Henderson had returned to England, on which some vague feeling of peril had not been present in her mind; what it was she had never clearly known, but it lurked and gleamed out of darkness, like some lighthouse beam showing where rocks were dangerous, appearing and disappearing again. But to-day all that had vanished in a manner as inexplicable as her fears themselves had been; she could never have said precisely what they were, nor could she precisely say why they had gone, except that now for the three days in which they had been in the country

Ida had been as unconsciously serene as a child—no cloud, however briefly, had crossed the blue: she seemed to have wholly got rid of that which had overshadowed her. And she answered the girl's question with confidence.

"All sorts of winter, dear," she said. "Yes, just that. We all—you, Jack, and I—all know more or less what we mean. Jack and I buried the things of winter after lunch to-day; you and Jack, I see, have buried them also. And all three together we bury them."

There was no need of more words—more words, indeed, would have spoiled the completeness of the moment—and Ida turned again to the bed where the innocents were prepared for their sacrifice.

"Plumbago?" she said in a voice of bewildered inquiry. "Or am I mad?"

Mrs. Desmond shuddered.

"I put the best plant back," she said, "in case, just in case, March might not happen to be quite as warm as I am sure it will be. And we agree, Tom and I, that it is a great mistake to coddle plants too much. Oh, Ida, have I been very rash? It is all slightly allegorical, don't you understand?"

Ida understood and smiled.

"I think perhaps I should cover the allegories up at night with some matting," she suggested. "It won't spoil the allegory, will it? And it is rather kinder."

Mrs. Desmond thought this an excellent idea, and jumped at it.

"Yes, I will do that," she said with much relief. "It—it will improve the allegory, if anything, and also perhaps the plumbagos: as you say, too, it is kinder. And while we're about it, I think the verbenas might be covered, too, at night. And perhaps the begonias. Or shall we make the allegory very realistic as far as concerns the begonias? I'm not very fond of them!"

Ida looked perfectly grave.

"I think too great realism is a mistake," she said. "It is inartistic."

"Yes, yes," said her aunt. "Yards of matting, Tom, over everything that I have bedded out this afternoon. The thick kind, you know, not that flimsy stuff that lets the frost in. Not that there is going to be any. Yes, pray do it to-night

before you go home, and send at once into the village if you think you have not got enough. It is already a little chilly!"

For so the golden days ran their perfect course without interruption from fogs or frosts. No more propitiatory sacrifices were required of Mrs. Desmond, for, indeed, it seemed that the gods most envious of human happiness were content to grant it here without stint or reservation. In themselves, as regards actual incidents, the hours were uneventful, as are most hours when happiness is as complete as theirs was. Jack and Ida sometimes rode together, sometimes roamed aimlessly without the distraction of golf-balls over the heathery uplands of the forest, or strayed beneath the firs, where their steps went silently over the carpets of fallen needles. To be together was amply and utterly sufficient, and if one saw a squirrel, that was event enough for a morning, or the brown fallen acorns of last year, out of which Ida fashioned a doll's cup and saucer, would detain them so long that they would be late for lunch, and Jack would have to produce them as evidence to Mrs. Desmond of the weighty cause of their unpunctuality. Then four days of brilliant sun and warm wind was succeeded by a tearing gale out of the south-west that flung rattling sheets of rain broadcast against the windows, and fluted with weird shrieks and moans in the chimneys, making the open wood fire in the hall spring upwards in leaping yellow flame, and the core of heat glow with the draught that drew up the chimney, while the wind wailed like a legion of lost spirits at the corners of the house. Yet that too, that morning of enforced indoor life, was also a page of perfection, and instead of the open air they had the more intimate and domestic hours by the fireside: a privacy was theirs that the long rambles over the forest, perfect as they were, could not give them. The gale in its savage fury only brought exhilaration to Ida, and no Sirocco forebodings, as in Egypt, made her quiver and tremble. So much, indeed, was this so, that after the morning by the fireside she felt so stirringly the delicious unrest of the screaming wind enter her very bones, that she and Jack had gone out and tramped through puddles and dripping heather to the very top of the ridge of the forest in order to lean against the full south-west blast as against a solid wall, and drink in and store themselves with the fierce joy of the hurricane. Stand-

ing there close together, they had to shout to make their voices audible; the riot and rage of the storm was indescribable, and they stood alone, without a soul in sight, shut off from all the world by gray walls of driving rain on all sides of them. Then, turning, they were fairly blown home again with faces stung into glorious warmth and glow by the buffeting of wind and rain, laughing with the pure delight of any experience which they shared together. Then tea by the fireside succeeded their change of raiment, and with Mrs. Desmond they played absurd childish games, hide-and-seek all over the darkened house, with who knew what bogies lurking in linen cupboards, till Jack's courage altogether gave out, and he refused to face the terrors of the dining-room passage again, for fear that his nerve and self-control should altogether pass from him and leave him, for the rest of his life, no man, but an aspen-leaf. Dinner was a joyful parody of human intercourse, Mrs. Desmond, who had lately adopted in theory vegetarian principles, and in practice delighted in sirloin of beef, being a peg for gaiety. Then a parody of bridge, at which, with care, it was quite possible to lose five shillings, with explosive argument thrown in gratis, was the end of the day. But at the close of each ended day there was the dawn of the morrow to look forward to.

So the golden days, whether of sunshine or of deluging rain, sped by. The four days of country, which was all that had been originally planned, lengthened to a week, the week before the lapse of time was noticed was ten days, and the consequent fortnight might have stretched itself further, but for violent communications from Beatrice. As directress of the trousseau, she, with the mildness of utter despair, just asked for directions, since she could no longer reconcile it with her conscience to be responsible for anything. Did Ida intend to be married in a sponge-bag, for a sponge-bag, apparently, was the only thing definitely ordered. In case that was not her intention, would she kindly come to London for an hour or two and "try on"? A telegram was requested in reply, for which an ironical sixpence was enclosed; they were given reasonable time for consultation, but if no answer was received by tea-time on that day, Beatrice announced her intention of washing her hands even

of the sponge-bag, and observing what should follow on her severing her connection with the trousseau with interest not unmixed with amusement. The letter, in fact, was of the nature of an ultimatum, and as such, with intermingled shouts of laughter, Ida read it aloud at breakfast. Occasionally, for the letter was extremely long and in parts technical, she said, "Oh, I'll miss that out," but the bulk of it, anyhow, was conveyed to her audience.

Mrs. Desmond, on the afternoon before the arrival of the ultimatum, had banished operations in the garden, and behaved, as the other two thought, rather tiresomely.

"Be married in an alpaca if you like, dear Ida," she said, "in the Forest Row Church. But if you don't mean to do that—I don't oppose it in any way—consider what Bee says. It seems to me that there is a certain amount of sense in her letter."

Ida gave a deep sigh, and looked at Jack with raised eyebrows.

"Alpaca or London, Jack?" she asked.

"Alpaca," said he promptly, "or the sponge-bag."

Ida clapped her hands.

"Let us wire to Beatrice at once," she said. "'Shall be married in alpaca, no trousseau required; please counter-order everything, including sponge-bag.' Dear Bee, I think she would have a fit."

She had finished breakfast, and went across the room to the window. Traces of the storm remained yet in the channels ploughed in the gravel of the walks, the washings from the paths that had been carried on to the grass, and the twigs and branches torn off the shrubs by the wind; but the gale had quite blown itself out, and another calm morning of sunshine that flooded everything and was spread over the forest like a golden coverlet met her eye. But she turned away again with a sigh.

"I suppose one must go, after all," she said, "though I should like, as at bridge, to 'double' this fortnight we have had here, to begin it all over again. It has been so perfect—oh, it has been so perfect! But we needn't stop in London very long, need we, Aunt Julia, or do you want to be there now till Easter?"

"I must be there a week or two, dear," said she; "but there is no reason why you should stop. Come down here

again with Beatrice, if you like, as soon as you've satisfied her with regard to clothes."

Ida's eye brightened.

"That's a good idea," she said. "Somehow, I don't think I want to be long in London. I've got—what do they call it?—a sort of scunner of London. I suppose it is because I have had such a delicious time here. Well, we must settle, I suppose. Let us go up the day after to-morrow. Will that suit everybody?"

Jack rose also, and joined her at the window.

"I feel quite like you, Ida," he said. "I want to double this last week, because never in my life have I been so happy. But I must go up to town soon."

"Then, the sooner the better, and get it over," said Ida. "Thursday, then. What a pity that doubling is impossible! Because I don't want to go to London at all."

Accordingly, two mornings later they left. That cloudless morning after the storm had been but an interlude, and the weather had broken again angrily and in earnest. East winds had taken the place of the warm westerly breezes, and the garden cowered and was torn beneath the lash of cold rain. All the way up to town it beat pitilessly on the streaming windows of the carriage, and drummed a dismal tattoo on the roof. Their train crawled dispiritedly along, stopping at sodden, rain-drenched stations, where a few passengers huddled under mackintosh or umbrella, and the bookstalls displayed drenched and torn résumés of the morning's news. Jack had bought a paper, but it lay unregarded on his knee, and he stared listlessly out, while Ida, in the corner opposite him, had taken a book from her bag, but had at present not turned a page of it. Darker and more dreary it grew as they approached London; backs of houses of incredible meanness and squalor, with tiny soot-covered gardens containing a forlorn shrub or two, ran on either side of them through miles of monotonous suburbs. Again and again they were stopped by signals outside stations, and stood forlornly rained upon till, with a mournful hoot from the engine and a jerk of couplings, they crawled on again. Even Mrs. Desmond was somewhat affected by the delays and the darkness, and dozed uneasily—she was one of those eminently fortunate individuals whose sleep in trains is commensurate with the duration of the journey—

in her corner, till with a final jar they came to a standstill underneath the gloomy and soot-ridden vault of Victoria Station.

"Really, I wonder if we were wise to come up," she said. "Of all dreary mornings—— Why, Ida, what is the matter?"

For the girl had risen, and was looking out into the dark tunnel of the station with a face of terror and trembling hands clasped together.

She turned on her aunt's voice, and looked at her.

"Oh, it is dreadful!" she cried, "and I feel frightened. Oh, why did we leave the country, where we were safe, and come here? Why did we come—why did we come? We shall be sorry!"





NINETEENTH

ON that same dismal and dispiriting morning, and at about the same time as the party from Ryssop arrived at Victoria, Henderson was looking out from the window of his flat on to a mud-coloured scene. The houses in Davies Street opposite his windows looked as if they were built of mud, the street and pavements were certainly covered with mud, and the colour of the low drifting sky irresistibly suggested that buckets of liquid mud had been emptied into it. It was cold, too—cold with the marrow-searching dampnesses of east wind in February; a cold that penetrates more than a zero of firm frost, and seems to half congeal the flow of the blood and to stiffen and make heavy the joints. All these sensations were very vividly present to Henderson, as with a shiver of both moral and physical discontent he turned back again into his room, where, at any rate, the electric light was lit and the fire prospered in the grate.

Yet, though the physical environment was bad enough to justify a shiver of disgust, it must be confessed that in most ways, at any rate, his other circumstances were serene and cheerful enough. The set of six lectures on psychical subjects of which he had just given the last had met with a success that had exceeded his most sanguine expectations, and this very morning he had just signed a highly advantageous agreement with a prominent publisher to bring them out in book form. He was also giving a series of séances which had been no less remunerative from not merely a financial point of view—though, indeed, from that standpoint he had no reason to be dissatisfied with the result. For he had invited representatives of various learned societies in England to be present at one; he had invited them also to bring a conjurer, an adept at tricks and sleight-of-hand, to help them to observe, and also to impose any tests, except that

of broad light, that they wished. They came, if not to curse like Balaam, yet certainly in a suspicious and antagonistic spirit, and one or two of them, at any rate, went away, if not exactly blessing, at any rate very much interested, and, to tell the truth, rather frightened. For Henderson had warned them that they must not come expecting to hear slow music, or any playing of hymns on a cracked banjo, or messages of a vaguely cheering kind about faith, hope, and love, and a life beyond the grave. Of the life beyond the grave he hoped he would be able to convince them, if any needed conviction on such a point, but there would probably be nothing about faith, hope, or love. The control, in fact, which he proposed to present to them—he had a certain secret glee in using this mercantile phrase—was that of an ancient Egyptian, who, as far as could be judged, was not particularly loving. But he appeared to be very powerful, and Henderson proposed, when they were assembled at Davies Street, certain experiments which might be of interest, inviting the representatives of the learned societies to suggest others. His own suggestions were quite simple, but rather difficult to explain except by supposing that supernatural agency had perhaps a finger in the matter. The control in question did not speak English, or, indeed, any living tongue; but since an eminent Egyptologist was among them, no doubt the hieroglyphic writing which he hoped might be witnessed would be interpreted to them by this gentleman. This particular séance, it must be understood, was one of invitation: should the Psychical Society, the Swastika Club, the Society for the Promotion of Occult Science, the New Theosophists, and others, desire to see more, he would be happy to arrange further sittings for them, if they cared to pay for them. One thing also Henderson insisted on: namely, that everybody should sit within a certain ring which he had marked out on the boards and surrounded with certain cabalistic signs, and not stir from it, on oath, till he gave them leave. He would not otherwise be responsible for what might occur. This condition, after consultation, was accepted, though at first the more experienced were disposed to demur to this.

The tests imposed were sufficiently strict, being the outcome of the ingenuity of all present directed towards the elimination of any possibility of fraud or trickery. The

members of the learned societies searched the room as if for hidden treasure, but found it not: Mohammed and Henderson voluntarily submitted to a similar scrutiny. Windows were bolted and sealed, doors were treated likewise, the table was tapped and sounded by the conjurer as if it had been a patient with tubercular disease. Then came the consideration of Henderson's proposed experiments. In a locked box on a small table near the window was laid paper and a pencil, on which it was hoped that the "control" would write answers to any questions which were suggested, and which Henderson or the Egyptologist would translate to him. There were also, he proposed, to be placed there any ordinary coin of the realm, which Set-nekht should be asked to crumple up like a fragment of soft paper, just by way of showing that he was possessed of something more than ordinary physical strength; a pocket-knife which he should be asked to stick in the ceiling, which was some ten feet above the floor; and two separate curtain-rings which he should be asked to link together. Also there was a question asked him, but what it was only the Egyptologist who had written it knew.

These experiments, after being revised in a few small details, were accepted as satisfactory, and the representative scientists proceeded to tie up Mohammed till he resembled a trussed hen. His master also insisted on being treated in the same way, and the control of the light, which was to be turned off as soon as Mohammed was in a trance, was given to the president of the Swastika Club, a gentleman of infinite incredulity, in whose presence, as of the sun, fraudulent spiritualists had often ere now melted away like morning mists. Then the séance took place, and when, half an hour later, the light was turned up again, rather pale faces were seated round the table. All the time during which he had been in trance Mohammed had moaned, the moan occasionally rising to a shriek of terrified horror or breaking into a babble of wild, entreating words. Then, when he was awakened, he suddenly burst into tears. After that, as soon as the contents of the box on the table by the window had been annexed by one of the guests, he was set free from his bonds, and after a word to Henderson left the room.

Professor Clarence, the gentleman of so fine an incredulity, turned to Henderson.

"May I ask what your medium said?" he asked.

"By all means. He said that the control is very angry. He said also he wants something—what, I am afraid I cannot tell you: it is a private matter."

Then the box was unlocked and the contents of it examined: the paper of hieroglyphics was taken possession of by Professor Clarence, a florin all crumpled up like a fragment of tinfoil passed from hand to hand, two curtain-rings were interlaced and showed no mark of a join, and in the ceiling was embedded a pocket-knife. Then the interpretation of the hieroglyphic writing, executed with exquisite neatness, was communicated.

"Set-nekht, the steward of the king Seti, is present, and writes this."

"His Ka was laid to rest in the temple of Mut, and in the temple of Mut, a year ago, his spirit, which had been laid to rest, was again set free by one who sits here."

"He wants one who is lawfully his——"

Henderson started, and made a gesture of interruption.

"I must ask you not to read more of that," he said, "if there is any name that follows."

"No, there is no name," said Professor Clarence, feeling suddenly suspicious, though, indeed, it was difficult for him to determine exactly what there was to be suspicious about.

"He says, 'She was outside the circle, and she is mine.'"

A pause.

"One hundred and fifty-three."

"What was that question?" asked Henderson.

"The question was, 'What is nine times seventeen?'"

"It seems correct," said he dryly. "At least, I make it that."

Such had been the strange occurrences that took place on the occasion of the invitation séance, on which a series of others had followed, and this very morning the whole press was agog with the accounts of the new magic, this dangerous, delightful magic, in which, so to speak, the very flame of the nethermost pit played around the earnest inquirer. And Mr. Henderson, so the conversational comments ran, which were quite as voluminous as those of the press, was such a dear Italian blood, you know—his mother was a Marchesa—so gentle, so interested in what one said, and

an inquirer only himself. Of course the prices of his séances were rather high, but everyone wants to go, and it is difficult to get in at all, but perhaps if we ask him to dinner he will somehow make room for us.

Now all these very propitious events had happened, but this morning, when Henderson turned back from the contemplation of the universal mud-colour to his warm, bright room, no thought of it all was in his head. Just two lines of the *Morning Post* filled his entire consciousness—two lines which announced the date of the marriage of Miss Ida Jervis. It was to take place at St. Peter's, Eaton Square, on the second of April.

For a whole fortnight now he had borne, like the Spartan boy, in silence and with a certain heroism that was altogether praiseworthy, the fox gnawing at his entrails. He knew that Ida had left London, for the shuttered house, off which he could not keep his eyes as he passed, told him that. Yesterday, too, seeing that they were still absent, he had called there to inquire about their return, and heard they would be back this morning. It was that thought that banished all other dreams and ambitions, already realized or in process of realization, from his head. While Ida had been away it had been rather less difficult, rather less impossible, not to yearn after her to repress, as he had done, the call to her which he knew she must answer. But now, in an hour or two, perhaps already, she would be back, a few hundred yards away from him only. That, coupled with the lines in the *Morning Post*, made an intolerable thought. She—that six feet of English beef beside her, always beside her——

All morning until after noon he sat alone with this thought, which like some angry, inflamed spot throbbed and burned within him, making him restless and unable to apply himself to anything, as if he had been feverish. Outside the mud-coloured day passed on in dark unluminous hours; inside the room Mohammed, silent-footed, stole in and out again with a log for the fire, and a glance at his master to see if he wanted anything, surprised that he sat without employment in his armchair, for it was seldom that he did that. And, indeed, Henderson wanted something very much, and each time that Mohammed came in he looked at him, wondering, idly, so he told himself, whether it would come to

this, that she should be driven to him, and whether one day he would no longer be able to keep himself from employing any means which should bring her to him.

His thought might be idle, but he gave leave to his imagination, anyhow, to work round it with festoon and embroidery, till, like some rose-supporting arch, the arch itself was unseen beneath the burden that blossomed and leaned on it. Driven to him, if needs be, driven—oh, a thousand times “no”! That torpedo he could not direct on her. It was a bargain with hell itself. Yet he and she together, she by any means brought to lean on him, like the supported rose to blossom on him! For she was that without which he was less than half himself; she was his completeness, and he—he could not help knowing this—could alone fulfil the utmost yearnings of her spiritual nature. To think of her just as a mother of children, a housewife in a humdrum English home, was inconceivable. Better that she should die than live to be so great a parody of what she might be. Yet he distrusted the sober conclusions of his own mind; his longing for her was such, indeed, that he knew he could not think soberly where she was concerned. And on the second of April at St. Peter’s, Eaton Square—

But better a mere objectless tramp through the leaden, mud-coloured streets than this fevered musing indoors; and, indeed, he had an object in going out. He felt he could not apply himself to anything while he was still uncertain whether she had or had not come back to London: for while she was in the country, while even so few miles separated them, he seemed to himself to acquiesce in her absence, but what he could not stand was the uncertainty whether she was back yet, separated from him only by a couple of hundred yards of London streets. It would be something to be sure she was not yet back in London; it would also be something to be sure that she was. Certainty, anyhow, on this point was essential to him: he could not bear not to know where she was. He had to think of her definitely, with the details of the place where she was round her, to complete the image of his thought: and he must know whether she was down at Ryssop, in which case the acuteness of his feeling would be a little assuaged, or whether she was now close at hand. He realized how objectless, how fruitlessly sentimental, was his expedition, but reason

was vanquished: he could neither rest nor work till he knew where she was.

Outside the windless, perpendicular rain splashed into the puddles of its own making. Just opposite his flat the road was half up, and where the wooden bricks of the roadway had been removed, a pool of water three inches deep was collected, into which the rain splashed more resonantly. No further road-mending was possible in this downpour, and the iron furnace for the liquefaction of the asphalt to lay over the bricks was covered with a dripping tarpaulin. Iron posts and ropes hedged round the area of mending, and though it was noonday, so dark was the noon that lit lanterns hung upon them to warn carriages. From the windows of other houses, too, lights gleamed, and at intervals down the street the lamp-posts were crowned with a weary flicker of flame. The day was dead and windless: a London fog seemed imminent, should not some breeze ventilate the town and disperse the growing density of the cloud and smoke that overhung it.

Further south, though the distance was but a few hundred yards, the day was more luminous, and in Berkeley Square itself the gas was not lit. The plane-trees in the garden stretched crooked, writhing fingers against the sky, and the houses were sharply outlined against a less leaden gray. But inside the rooms lights were lit, and fanlights flared above the doors: one house, the one which was his goal, was illuminated in all its stories, and he paused opposite it. At the moment a motor-brougham came round the lower end of the Square, and he went back some twenty paces. It drew up at the house he watched. A big, tall woman got out, a man followed, there followed him a girl. They had been expected, for the front-door opened the moment the carriage drew up at the house, and a blaze of bright light was cast across the pavement. They all three went in, the door was shut with a muffled clap of sound, and he was left outside under the gray and dripping sky.

The object of his walk was accomplished: she had come back, and he carried home with him the knowledge, sat with it in front of his fire again, saw it stare at him from the book he made pretence to read, found it wedged among the bundle of press cuttings about himself like a withered flower, met it everywhere and whichever way he turned.

But the certainty did him no good; even now that he knew, he was no more able to settle to anything. It grew more arresting too; it obscured the whole page of his book, so that no idea could pass from it to his brain; it got between him and the fire so that he shivered, it stared in at the windows, it called to him from corners. Ida was back: she was near: in a couple of minutes he could be with her: in a couple of minutes she could be with him. For he had only to call.

Then that last thought, "he had only to call," was like an anchor cast from some drifting balloon, which at length had caught in something firm. For the last fortnight he had drifted on, ropes out, the grappling anchor swinging close to the earth, yet not catching, for his mind desired itself indulgence in that thought. But now it had caught: his drifting was stayed, a rope was taut between him and the earth, so taut that it twanged to the breeze. He had only to call: one call, she would hear: she could not help hearing. And, hearing, she could not help coming; he had already arranged that.

Henderson had not waited after seeing the party of three into the house, for he had seen enough. But had he remained there a little longer he would have seen Jack come out again. He would have seen him, too (and that would have interested him), go to that house in St. James's Street where he himself not long ago had passed an hour or two after dinner at the Bath Club. And could he have followed him into the sitting-room, with its bookcases full of fat medical lore, and listened, he would have been even more interested.

Leonard was at lunch; his man-servant, seeing Jack enter, softly laid another place, but Jack's genial nod to him, as an old servant of his friend, was absent. Cumbered, like Martha, with serving, he did not heed the talk, and even if he had heeded, he would have been but little the wiser. Jack, indeed, scarcely nodded to Leonard, but took a chair beside him and began to talk at once.

"Yes, we are just back," he was saying. "She has never been more natural and more serene than she has been all this fortnight. We played the silliest games, and took the longest walks, and did nothing. But the moment we got

into Victoria, she was frightened. I only stopped a few minutes: I just went with them to the house, and she is still awfully frightened. What about, God knows. I dropped a book in the hall, like a silly fool, and she screamed out, 'What is that? Is that somebody coming? Don't let him in.' For any sake, Leonard, go round there and see what it is. If I know what it is, that is something. If any of us know what it is, it is something: one can act then, and not go mad in this dreadful ignorance and suspense. Oh, confound your lunch! you can have lunch every day: just go there now: lunch there: it is perfectly natural. But just try to find out what is happening. It isn't anything that I can put my finger on that she fears; it isn't nerves, or this horrible day, or London. She fears something that is coming. By the way, have you anything to tell me? Have you found out anything more?"

Leonard had risen.

"Nothing definite," he said.

"Then don't tell me. But as soon as there is something definite, something for the hands to do, anything, anything to do——" he cried, suddenly losing control over his voice.

Leonard turned on him sharply.

"Look here, Jack," he said: "if you are going to behave in a silly hysterical manner, I'll have nothing more to do with you. Good heavens, man! if that's your tune, I shall just prescribe you a sedative, and stop here to see that it acts. You're all jingling with nerves: I can hear them."

Jack rose up, huge and square, from his untasted fish.

"Go," he said—"just go. And if you come back and tell me that it's I who am unreasonably alarmed, you may dissect all my nerves one after the other, and send them to the College of Surgeons. If you don't go I'll kick you," he said with a grim calmness.

Leonard could not quite stand this: he did not wish to torture Jack with delays, but, really, no self-respecting man could let this pass.

"Kick away, then," he said.

Instantly Jack's manner changed.

"Oh, my dear chap," he said, "for Heaven's sake go, if it's only to console me. I would do the same for you; I would go on a wild-goose chase further than Berkeley Square, if my going would comfort you, however unreason-

able I thought it. So, please, I apologize for all I have said, if that will do."

Leonard, as a matter of fact, would have gone in any case: he only insisted on the decencies of life being observed. As Jack had said, there was nothing unnatural in his dropping into lunch at Berkeley Square, and without further delay he hailed a hansom, and even told the man to drive quick.

Jack, left alone, ate an automatic lunch, lit a cigarette, and waited. But he had scarcely finished when his host was back again. Leonard wasted no inquiries on the nerves of the other; he took, automatically, as Jack had eaten his lunch, a cigarette from the box his servant handed him.

"You have lunched?" asked Jack; this also was automatic.

"No."

He lit his cigarette, and puffed at it furiously once or twice without replying.

"Thank God, Abdul is there," he said.

Jack tried to speak and failed; at the second attempt a croak of words came from his mouth.

"What is it?" he said.

Leonard threw his hands apart.

"I have no idea," he said. "She is frightened, terribly frightened. That is all I know. She is not ill—her body is not ill at least, pulse strong, breathing good. But, Jack, you must be prepared for her being ill. There is something, I don't know what it is—I wish to God I knew—that we have to fight. We can fight it in two ways. That is to say, Abdul is fighting it now. He is talking to her in Arabic, a language I don't understand; but I am convinced that he is on her side—whatever that is—and what he says keeps her quiet, or in any case the seizure does not get worse. She was clinging to him like a child."

"Seizure?" asked Jack.

"Yes. Whatever is the matter with her, it is serious, or it may become so. There then is another way in which we may fight it—that is my affair. I only came back here to get—to get things I might want."

Jack's mouth went suddenly dry, and he poured out a glass of cognac and drank it like water.

"What things?" he asked in a sort of strangled whisper.

"It won't do you any good to know," he said, "but it won't do any harm. A morphia syringe, that is one; a bottle of A.C.E., that is another."

"What is that?"

"An anæsthetic. My dear chap, there is no reason at present to be frightened, and in any case, if there is reason to be frightened, it is unspeakably important that you should not be. But if this goes on, in any case if it gets worse, it may be necessary to render her body powerless, and to relieve by unconsciousness some stress and tension that are going on in her brain."

Then he threw his half-smoked cigarette into the grate.

"I don't believe what I am afraid of, mind," he said.

"And I tell myself again and again that she has got a bad attack of nerves of some kind. Nerves may take any form; you can't possibly forecast exactly what you will have to fight. But they usually—in fact, it is perfectly usual—they usually, like influenza, attack your weak point."

Then the lover rose in arms.

"Ida's weak point?" he cried.

"Yes, fear of certain things, and also of a certain person. Jack, there is a man in this town whom I fear, too. The name does not matter."

Jack got up, suddenly calmed by the prospect of doing something.

"Davies Street, isn't it?" he asked in a perfectly steady voice. "What's his number?"

"That's no good. At least, that is not the important part. It is no good, I mean, you going to him straight as you would like to do. You would only get taken up for assault, or perhaps murder, and you would not help matters in the least. 130A is the number, if you wish to know, but you mustn't go there till there is some object to be served in doing so. Now let me think a minute."

In happier hours Jack had nicknamed his friend Sherlock Holmes, for that masterpiece in fiction bore a certain resemblance to the astute Leonard. Though he did not smoke a few ounces of shag tobacco when he was in a difficulty, he always smoked, and though a couple of minutes ago he had thrown one half-consumed cigarette into the fireplace, he took another. He sat motionless as he inhaled it all, though he was the author of a small brochure on the danger

of inhalation, and inhaled the whole of yet another before he spoke, while Jack fidgetted about the room.

"You are no good inside the house," he said at length. "But wait opposite 130A. You had better go there now—one can't tell."

"And do what?"

"That also I can't tell you. I don't know what is going to happen. But you must do as seems to you right. It is just possible that she may go there, or that he may come to Berkeley Square. At least one must be prepared for that. If he does, follow him, and prevent his ringing the bell. He mustn't come in: you must see to that."

"And if she goes there?" asked Jack.

Leonard gave a long frown to this.

"Follow her into the house," he said at length, "if you cannot intercept her before she goes in, and bring her back. Carry her back."

Jack started up.

"But it can be prevented," he cried; "or are we all in Bedlam? What are the police for? what is Scotland Yard for?"

Leonard almost laughed, and his laughter would have been more grim than his gravity.

"What has he done?" he asked. "What crime do you propose to charge him with?"

There was no reply possible: occult power was no more recognised in West London than in the Soudan, and Leonard rose.

"I am going back straight to Berkeley Square," he said. "What I may have to do I have no idea. And you must go, too. Watch the house: I have no more idea what you will have to do than I have about myself. Watch there for an hour: then, if nothing has happened, walk on the right-hand pavement back to Berkeley Square and inquire for me. If I am not there, I shall have left some message for you. We are all absolutely in the dark: we cannot arrange for any contingency as certain."

In ten minutes they were off, and walked together as far as the Berkeley Square house. Here Leonard went in, and the other went northwards up Davies Street till he came to the house that he was to watch. There was a saddler's below it, and the clean, aromatic smell of leather hung curi-

ously in the still damp air. Above the saddler's was a row of large-paned windows; three of these were lit; above that, again, was the third story: here the blinds were already drawn.

The rain had practically ceased, but the darkness, though it was still not much after three of the afternoon, was like that of night, and the street-lamps were all lit. The fog, though it might descend any minute, hung somewhere high above the town, for it was perfectly clear down here in the streets, and the tops even of the highest houses showed no blur of outline. The far side of the road opposite the house he watched was taken up; behind it was a narrow arched entrance to some mews, and in shelter of this Jack took up his position, for from the darkness of it he could observe without himself attracting attention. The street was strangely deserted: only at long intervals did any wheeled traffic pass him, and even the passengers on the pavements were few, so that a single step was audible in either direction for many yards. And even these few seemed all to be single passengers, and for the first half-hour, certainly, of his vigil Jack heard no sound of the kindly human voice. He longed for it to be otherwise; had the sun shone, had the street been bustling with the usual ordinary crowd all intent on their daily superficial work, he felt that his agony of suspense would have been somehow more endurable. But the silence, the darkness, the few and lonely passengers, so aggravated it that he could almost have screamed for the disquiet of his nerves. Then someone appeared at one of the windows of the first-floor above the saddler's, and looked out for a minute or two. There was a gas-lamp just opposite, and his face was vividly illuminated, white, haggard, and set. It was Henderson.

He stood there with eyes fixed on Jack, yet Jack felt sure, though he drew himself a little more into the shadow of the arch, that they saw nothing except some inward vision of his own brain, the vision that ruled those deep furrows in his forehead and compressed the thin mouth into those hard, unyielding lines. Then suddenly, with an awful gesture as of despair or surrender of some sort, Henderson threw his arms wide. But after that the white, haggard face was changed, the compressed mouth smiled, a dreadful kind of joy was written there, but a joy of no kindly or wholesome

sort. Then, with a couple of movements, he drew the curtains over the window, reappeared after a second or two at the next window, and then at the third. Over all he drew the curtains: the flat had closed its eyes. Yet it did not seem to Jack as if it slept: it had closed its eyes for concentration, for meditation, for the maturing of the schemes that filled the busy brain within.

The hour was up sooner than he had expected, but Jack stayed five minutes more, and then walked back along the right-hand pavement towards Berkeley Square. He noticed that the overhead fog was descending, and the tops of the houses, though still in the street below the air was clear, were just blurred with brown vapours and swirling wreaths of fog. For a hundred yards down the street he met no one; then quite suddenly he was conscious that a rapid, light step was coming towards him from the direction in which he was going. It was so quick that it was almost a run, and some inner sense of strange foreboding and dismay told him that it was terribly familiar to his ears. Then the owner appeared out of the darkness already close to him, a tall, slight figure, and under a gas-lamp they met face to face.

Ida stared at him, as he put his arms out to stop her, with blank, unseeing eyes: no light of recognition even was in them: it was as if she had never set eyes on him before, or, indeed, did not see him now. The next moment, with a sudden movement of incredible strength and quickness, she had thrust his arm aside, had passed him, and was running up the street. At the same moment he heard more steps tearing up behind him, but without pausing to look round—though he guessed whose they might be—he had started after her. But run as he might, he could not gain on her, for some supernormal excitement impelled her to a speed which ever outdistanced his own. Her figure stood out clear for a moment as it passed the lights of the saddlery shop; she sprang up the three steps of the side-door, and just as Jack came up it was banged in his face.

In a couple of seconds more, while he still hesitated, the steps that had followed joined him. It was Leonard, hatless, splashed with mud, breathless with his race after the girl.

"Can't explain now," he said. "In we go!"

The door had apparently been on the latch before: now

it was closed, and they had to wait till the bell was answered.

Then to the man who appeared Leonard merely said, "Mr. Henderson is on the first floor, is he not? I have business with him which cannot wait," and pushed by the astonished servant. Upstairs he dashed, followed by Jack, and the two burst together into Henderson's room.

He was standing on the hearthrug: opposite to him was Ida.

She turned as they entered, and put up her hand to her head. The spell that had held her as she dashed past him in the street was over, apparently: it had done its work and had brought her here, and now her eyes were those of a conscious, living being. She looked puzzled, indeed, but she was the Ida whom Jack knew, by whom he was known.

"Jack?" she said. "And you, Mr. Compton? Why am I here? And you, Mr. Henderson? Where am I? What house is this? Ah, yes, I know now."

She sat down in a dazed, helpless attitude.

"Jack, take me home," she said.

He stood over her between her and Henderson.

"Yes, dear, yes," he said. "We will go now at once. Take her downstairs, Leonard. I've got one word to say to this man."

Ida rose again with the same helpless, unresisting obedience, and left the room with Leonard. At the door she paused a moment, looking back like a child for her best friend, who lingered.

"You're coming, too, Jack?" she asked, with a curious, hesitating utterance.

"Yes, in a moment: I'll be with you in a moment," he said.

He closed the door behind her when she had gone out with Leonard.

"I've only a minute," he said, "and I don't know what this devilry means, or want to know. It is some black art of yours, I suppose. But if anything of this sort happens again I will kill you—kill you with my hands! throttle you, you devil! Have you anything to say?"

Henderson looked at him a moment with a smile gathering on his lips, the same sort of smile as Jack had seen there an hour ago when he watched outside in the street.

"I think you will be sorry you said that," he said very softly.

Jack did not wait, but went after the others, catching them up just outside the house. Ida was quite quiet, her eyes were still a little troubled, and she took Jack's arm, clinging close to him.

"What has been happening?" she said.

"Nothing, dear, nothing," said Jack, moistening his lips before he could speak. "You—you tell her, Leonard," he said.

"We won't speak of it," he said; "there is nothing to be afraid of, Miss Ida. And I promise you it shan't happen again. You are just coming quietly home with us, and we will take care of you."

Then a sudden terror came into the girl's eyes.

"You didn't quarrel with him—with Mr. Henderson?" she said to Jack. "You must be very careful about him. He is so strong, so dreadfully strong. I think even God must be afraid of him."

There were no more words till they reached the house again. Mrs. Desmond was standing bareheaded on the pavement outside the door, looking out up towards Davies Street.

"Ah, thank God! thank God!" she cried as she saw them. "You have brought her back safe. Now, dear Ida, you will be good, will you not? and do all that Mr. Compton tells you. He will soon make you comfortable."

"Why, of course," said she, "if he can only make me better, I will do anything he tells me. Here and here"—and she touched her head and her breast—"I am well; but deep down inside somewhere I am ill—oh, so ill! and so tired! If you could only make me sleep inside! What am I to do, Mr. Compton?"

"Go upstairs," said he—"go and lie down in your bedroom: I will come to you in a minute."

Ida smiled at them, nodded, and held Jack's hand a moment. Then, with the docility of a child, she walked upstairs, as she had been bidden.

Leonard waited till she had gone: then he turned to the others and spoke with the quick peremptoriness of a man who was used to being obeyed.

"You must face the whole of it, Jack, and you too, Mrs.

Desmond," he said, "so listen. She is so much under the hypnotic influence of that man that he has but to say to himself, 'Come here,' and she goes. She slipped away just now when I had left her for a moment, and how she ran you saw. That is all bad enough, but that is only half: it is less than half the whole danger. He has, or she believes he has—and to a girl as sensitive as that it is precisely the same thing—he has under his control a spirit of awful and evil potency. At any moment he may loose that power on her. It would be the act of a fiend, so we must be prepared for it. I believe also—I cannot help believing it—that it is true, that some horrible power is at his command. Now, what did you say when you stopped behind just now, Jack?"

"I said I would kill him if this occurred again."

Leonard waved his hands in impotent dismay.

"Ah, I might have guessed it," he cried. "I should never have let you stop. And he?"

"He said I should be sorry for saying that."

Leonard shrugged his shoulders: the thing was done, and it was no use wasting regrets over it.

"Now I am going upstairs," he said, "and I shall be here all night. If there is any indication that the hypnotic influence is being exerted over her again, I shall give her morphia. And if I see any sign of any stronger and more awful influence at work, I shall give her a more potent anæsthetic. It will be no time then for half-measures."

"How will you be able to tell that?" asked Mrs. Desmond, but her voice faltered and broke.

"She will be frightened," said Leonard, "and that fright will be something different to the state she has been in to-day." He paused a moment. "Also she will squint," he said.

There was a moment's dreadful pause, while the horror of all that was possible passed by each in procession. Outside the clear darkness had given place to the thick density of the descended fog; it had come down and engulfed the streets, flooding them with a palpable gloom. Then Leonard turned to Jack again.

"Come upstairs and wait outside in case I want you," he said. "She may struggle, she may have terrible strength. I want Abdul, too. Wait outside with him, and tell him all I have told you."

Mrs. Desmond laid her hand for a moment on Jack's shoulder, as a comrade to a comrade.

"Be a man," she said, "and be cool. You are going to fight perhaps for her very soul, dear, to-night, and that is a big prize. Yes, Leonard, I will send Abdul."

The two men went upstairs. Leonard tapped at the door of the girl's bedroom, and entered. She was lying on her sofa near the window: her maid was hovering uneasily about her with vague suggestions of eau-de-Cologne, hot water, and smelling-salts. She raised herself quickly as he entered, looking rather excited, yet completely herself; life, vitality, anyhow, was not wanting; the childlike docility was gone.

"I have lain down, as you told me to do," she said; "but indeed I am quite well, and why should I stop here? I must get up, too: I must go out: he is calling again, I think. I must go," she repeated, looking about her with troubled, eager eyes. "I think it would be altogether wiser of me if I went now. It is best always to obey, is it not?"

Leonard filled the hypodermic syringe. She did not see the intense scrutiny of his eyes nor the decision of the doctor.

"Yes, you shall go soon," he said soothingly, "but he is not really calling you yet. I shall hear, you may be sure, when he calls, and I will tell you. Just give me your hand."

Ida was still looking about from window to door, from door to window. She did not seem even to be conscious of the point entering her skin, and he pushed the piston home—a full dose. There was just one drop of blood on her wrist, and that he wiped away.

"You must really let me go," she said; "he is calling—really he is calling. And if I don't go he will be angry. And if he is angry—ah, let me go, for others may be angry, too."

She struggled to a sitting position, but Leonard pressed her gently and firmly back again.

"Now, you have got to do as I tell you for five minutes," he said. "He can wait for five minutes, and so can you. There is no hurry. But for these five minutes you have got to rest. You are really very tired, though you may not know it, and just a little rest will do you good. Now, anyone may

come and sit with you. Whom would you like? Jack? Abdul?"

The trouble in her eyes was increasing.

"I ought to go," she said, "but five minutes does not matter. If he wants me so much, he will not mind if I am five minutes late. Yes, send for Abdul, please. Send for him quick. I want him. And I have so little time to spare."

Leonard went to the door: Abdul was already there, and Jack was talking to him in whispers. A moment's more delay completed the communication that Jack had to make, and Abdul knew as clearly as any of them could know from the lips of her lover, the little they hoped, the much that they all feared. Then Leonard beckoned the Arab in. Ida's eyes were turned to the door as he entered, and she seemed to thirst for his presence.

"Oh, Abdul," she cried, "help me. It is all so dark, and I feel as if Sirocco was coming again. Do you not hear the trees sighing? Lighten our darkness—what is it?—I ought to go, too, but I am feeling heavy and sleepy, and the darkness is so deep. If I sleep for a few minutes, you will watch, won't you? Don't let anyone come to me while I am asleep. Keep them off—oh, pray, Abdul, pray! Evil is approaching; what was the rest of the message?"

"Be not afraid," said Abdul, "that was the rest of it. I will say it over and over to myself, for with my whole heart I know that is true. Ah, beloved lady, you are quite safe."

"But if It comes while I am asleep," cried Ida, her voice sinking a little, "I shall not be able to resist. And I am so tired: I would give anything to sleep. And, and——" her voice died for a moment into silence.

"But if you will promise to stop It," she said, "perhaps I might sleep for a little, and go to him afterwards. If you pray all the time, Abdul, I don't think It could hurt me. Yes, I must sleep first. Who is It?"

Then came a few more incoherent words, then a moan, a sigh, a long breath, and her head fell back.

Leonard was looking at her with a deep frowning intentness, and as her eyes closed he gave one sigh of immense relief: whatever was the will that called to her, the morphia that he had given to her was stronger than that.

"That has worked quickly and well," he said, "and, any-

how, we have gained a little time. God knows we want that. And what next—what next?" he added below his breath.

Abdul cast one long loving look at Ida's face.

"How long will that medicine keep her asleep, sir?" he asked. But he spoke with the tone of command: he was a general questioning his inferior with regard to the execution of some order.

Leonard looked at the syringe and the bottle of morphia; he had scarcely paused to consider how much he had given her.

"Six hours at least," he said, "unless—unless some—some—unless he brings a further influence to bear on her, which excites and terrifies her brain—unless——"

Abdul had gone to a ghastly pallor below his dusky skin; the communication Jack had made to him had eaten like vitriol into his mind.

"Unless he sends Set-nekht," he said. "And what then?"

"I shall give her stronger medicine," said Leonard.

"Strong enough?" asked the Arab. "As strong as what will be sent?"

"I hope so—I believe so. Anyhow, I shall be able to do no more."

The hours, those sick-room hours when every second lengthens itself into an hour of agonized suspense and every day is a lifetime of deferred and dying hopes, passed slowly on, and still Ida slept. Her breathing was so quiet, her repose so undisturbed, that Leonard began to think that he must have overestimated the strength of Henderson's power over her; for he had expected troubled sleep, at any rate, if not sleep actually broken by moments of consciousness, and the signs of struggle between a spirit that wanted to wake and a drugged brain that clogged it. But she breathed quietly, she hardly moved, and the sleep seemed perfectly natural. Or again, perhaps, Henderson had ceased for the present to exert any control over her; indeed, it was physically impossible that for hours at a stretch he could keep his mind in that state of tense application through which alone, as Leonard knew, hypnotic influence could be exerted. Whatever the cause of her quietness was, anyhow there was a lull, in which suffering was spared her, a period in which the watchers by her had time to think, to ponder over that unanswerable question, "What next?" And in

whispers at first, then in spoken tones, since their voices did not seem to disturb her, Leonard, Jack, and Abdul, each with an eye on the sleeping girl, discussed what had happened and what was to be feared.

Henderson stood quite still for some moments after Jack had left him with those words of ill-considered threatening, with that thin-lipped and not very pleasant smile on his face. He had in his hands a thin ivory paper-knife, which he rubbed gently with his brown slim fingers, and once or twice he said half aloud, "Yes, I think he will be sorry—I think he will be sorry." And with the tip of his tongue he just licked his lips.

Then that gentle rubbing motion ceased, the evil smile faded, and he stood as if made of stone, but that his eyes grew brighter as he looked out, not seeing what was in front of him, just staring into vacancy. Then a sudden spasmodic movement passed through him, the paper-knife splintered into fragments in his hand, and he moved quickly towards the door.

"Mohammed," he called, and from his room the boy came out.

"I shall want you, perhaps, in about an hour's time," he said. "Till then, go and pack all your things, all my things. There is a journey: we shall go to-night. Pack everything—clothes, papers, books, all that there is of mine or yours in the house."

Mohammed's eye brightened, and he gave a long sigh.

"To Egypt, to Luxor, effendi?" he said, with a sudden yearning for home, for these long days of fog and darkness had lost their novel excitement, and were unutterably gloomy to the sun-loving Southerner.

"Yes, to Egypt, to Luxor," said Henderson. "Begin the packing at once. You will have to be quick."

He shut the sitting-room door, closed his eyes a moment, and held out his arms in front of him, while all other thoughts came home to roost, and he concentrated himself on one thing alone.

"Come, Ida, come!" he said. "Come!"

He dwelt on the thought with all the intensity he could summon, so that his hands quivered with the mysterious magnetic force which was foaming out from him in flood

towards her. It was like that that he pictured it to himself: a torrent rushed down Davies Street and swirled in eddies about the door of her house. Through the door it passed unhindered, and, like an upward-gushing fountain, mounted and mounted till it burst into her room, and surrounded her, foaming and bubbling. Then, when that was completely pictured to his mind, he left her thus, so to speak, surrounded and enveloped in the force of his desire and command, and turned to certain arrangements that must be made. She must come, that was certain, and she would come of her own will, which was his will. Jack, Leonard, would try to stop her, and be unable; they would come with her here, no doubt, but what could they do? She would insist on going with him, and they were powerless.

His plans, then: first of all the train. He and she would dine together here and catch the night express. Morning would see them in Paris. Then South, South, as man and wife. At that thought for a moment he felt his heart beat and hammer, till it seemed that it must almost burst through the flesh and bones that covered it. Whatever he was, evil, unscrupulous, deadly, he was at least a man of force, of huge vitality, and all his conscious self yearned and longed for the girl. It was impossible that destiny did not decree that: they were made, so said the egoism of his love, made and predestined for each other to sound, lip to lip, the depths of passion, and rise together through knowledge, through the oneness of their souls, till earth was out of sight below them, and below them burned dim the very stars to which the eyes of men look up.

Then once more he followed the torrent of the magnetic power which he had poured out down to the house in Berkeley Square. It was still there, in foam and bubble round her, but something was rendering it effectless—something resisted it: it did not seem quite to touch her, though it was all round her. She should have been out of the house by this time; he should have been able to picture to himself the torrent returning, bearing her in it. But he could not—it still was not yet coming back to him: he could neither picture nor feel that, and knew it was not so.

But there were letters to be written, bills to be paid, notice to be given to the landlord, dinner to be ordered. All this took time; yet even when it was finished, he still knew that

Ida was not yet coming, and she should have been here by now. Physical force, he felt sure, could not have restrained her: if any of them—Leonard, Jack, Abdul—had tried by mere physical means to keep her, they must have seen that such compulsion would simply kill her. She would break sooner than not obey. Yet why did she not come?

The wicked and cruel smile again came on to his lips: there was another weapon yet in his armoury—the torpedo. It was horrible, no doubt: she would be terribly, mortally afraid, but come to him she must. Then, when she was with him, how he would comfort her, how his own force and will, which had so complete a command over her, would be her slave, her staff, and her consolation. How convincingly his love would prove to her, by her mere knowledge of its reality, that never more was it possible that he should use this against her. Once, just this once, it was necessary: after that impossible. Yet it was fiendish—he knew it was fiendish. But she must come—she must come. He could not do without her.

At that moment Mohammed entered: the very fitness of his entrance clinched the matter.

“It is done, effendi,” he said, “and the hour is up.”

Henderson looked at his watch; it was half-past five, and he had yet to go down to Westminster to settle certain affairs with one of the occult clubs with which he was in contract to give a sitting this very evening, explain as well as he could that very urgent business called him from town, and offer to renew the sêances in the summer, when he should again be in England. That would take him in this fog—for driving would be slower, even if it was possible, than walking—the best part of an hour: by seven he must be back here again, to dine before setting off. There was no time to lose. And he had so often contemplated the possibility of the necessity of what he was going to do sometime arising (though, perhaps, it had never till now been a sober imagining) that there was scarcely a struggle or a protest from his better self now.

“Make ready,” he said to Mohammed quickly.

Mohammed stared at him a moment; the brightness of his face which the anticipated return home had brought there died away.

“To sit, effendi?”

"What else?"

He wheeled the table out into the centre of the room: round it he drew the circle with its magic signs that he knew by heart: the lamp was set: the switch was by his hand: across the fire, which was burning very brightly, he drew a screen.

"Look at me, Mohammed," he said.

Then soon the switch clicked beneath his finger.

The room was nearly dark, but for a little reflected light on the ceiling which came from the fire behind the screen, and Mohammed moaned in his sleep. Then a splitting crack sounded from the table, a hot wind blew violently round the room, making the curtains to sigh and stir, and slowly from outside the circle the white luminous interlacing lines began to weave themselves in the air. More distinctly, more substantially every moment, the work of that infernal loom manifested itself: the swathed body of a man stood there, and there crowned it the white sneering face, beardless and wrinkled and evil, of the spirit that served the necromancer.

"Fetch her here," said Henderson. "I cannot bring her. Do not terrify her more than is necessary. I wish to find her here alive when I come back in an hour."

Then he slapped Mohammed on the hands.

"Wake!" he said; "it is finished."

The spirit faded quickly and was gone: once more the curtains stirred and rustled in the close-shut room with a wind that was not of the beneficent airs of heaven, and Henderson turned up the light. He himself was pale and excited; he half loathed himself for what he had done, yet had the hands of the clock gone back half an hour he would have done it again. The desire that had overmastered him then would at the last always overmaster him.

"I must go out now," he said to Mohammed. "She will be here soon. See to anything she wants. I shall be back in an hour. Make the room comfortable for her, and say nothing about the journey."

And he went out, trembling at himself and at what he had done, and was swallowed up in the density of the fog.

It was at that moment that suddenly the watchers in Ida's room heard the stillness rent and shattered by an awful cry,

a cry that shrilled higher and more appalling, a cry of despair and of hopeless, overwhelming terror. In one moment she, who had lain so still all these hours, breathing deeply and slowly, with the long, restful inspirations of sleep, had sat up on her sofa, her sleep ended, broad, wide awake, while these screams of abandoned, helpless terror poured from her. She was staring straight in front of her, her arms held out as if to ward off some dreadful presence which must have been very close to her, for her eyes looked inwards, squinting horribly.

"No, no!" she screamed. "I will come. I will——"

But there was no more, for in a couple of seconds Leonard was by her. He had poured a pool of the anæsthetic on to his handkerchief, and roughly, brutally, so it seemed, he held it over her nose and mouth. But with one movement of her arm she had thrust him aside again, and he called to the others.

"Come and help me to hold her, all of you!" he said. "It is life and death, and she has the strength of three men."

Then followed a couple of minutes so ghastly, so terrible, that none ever spoke of them afterwards, though none until death could ever forget them. She had rushed to the door, and, maniac-like, she had flung Jack from in front of it. It was no time for gentleness, and none knew that better than he, and he sprang fiercely at her again, the girl whom he revered and worshipped with a love and tenderness beyond all telling. He got hold of her arm and pulled her back again into the room away from the door, when she—yet it was she no longer, but only the hellish spirit that possessed her—turned on him like a wild cat, and bit to the bone the hand with which he grasped her. But he did not relax his hold, for his love made him strong, though her struggles were like the irresistible strokes of some steel piston-rod, and next moment Leonard had come up behind her, holding her neck with all his force in one hand, while with the other he again jammed the handkerchief across her face, pressing it close over her nose and mouth. Then Abdul got hold of her other arm, and, though shaken to and fro like a terrier, he clung to it with all his strength. Backwards and forwards, upsetting chairs, smashing through the table, this Laocoon group of wrestlers, who struggled not with a mere snake that could but kill the body, but with the awful in-

visible force of hell which was poured through the girl's limbs, swayed and hurled itself about the room. Through the handkerchief over Ida's nose and mouth there had soaked the blood from her lips where her teeth had bitten to the bone the man she loved, and down the sleeve of the arm he held it poured in floods from the wound in his hand. Now from one, now from another, would come a short, sharp gasp or pant as his strength was tested to its uttermost, but once only did human words issue from the mouth of any.

"Pray to God—pray to God!" cried Abdul once; "it is the very jaws and gate of hell."

Not less awful, too, was the hot and dreadful wind that blew through the curtained room, a wind that made the hair to stir on the head with its hot buffeting, and even turned the leaves of a book that lay open on a table. None had eyes for anything but that which occupied them, but once, sideways, Leonard thought he saw near the window a sneering, grinning face, a white, thin hand that pointed an unswerving finger of command to the centre of their group. And at that—for he had seen it before—the sweat poured from him, and he knew for certain that it was It with whose power they wrestled.

Then again one spoke.

"Thank God," panted Leonard, whose strength was nearly exhausted, "it is taking effect; she is weakening."

Then slowly, yet with horrible momentary renewals of the paroxysms, so that again they were flung about the room, the demoniacal strength began to lessen as the anæsthetic gained on her. The struggles grew fainter, then ceased, and she fell back limp and unconscious into the arms of those who held her. Then with loving tenderness they took her to the sofa off which she had sprung but a couple of minutes ago, and laid her down. She was breathing very quickly, and her eyes were still open, and they still looked inwards. But of the horror of the last moments there was nothing left but that.

Then Jack knelt by her: he covered her eyes, and, as if he had been alone with her, he kissed her very gently on the forehead. Then he turned to Leonard.

"She will die, will she not?" he said. "I think, I hope she will die. O my God! my God!"

Leonard was looking at her with brows knitted; he had taken the anæsthetic from her face.

"I can't possibly tell," he said. "By the way, let me tie up your hand."

Then he laid his hand on Jack's shoulder.

"Poor chap!" he said. "But be ready: what may happen I don't know. This may perhaps be only a breathing space. Ah!"

Ida had moved her head with a sudden jerk, and he sprang to her side, and for a few seconds more he put the anæsthetic over her face till she grew quiet again. Every now and then she moaned gently in her sleep.

Since she had become unconscious Abdul had stood a little apart. After she was quiet again Leonard had busied himself for a minute or two in binding up Jack's hand. But when that was done Abdul touched him on the shoulder.

"Can your medicine keep her like that for an hour perhaps?" he said.

"Yes, I think so," said he.

"Then there is a chance," he said. "That is for me to do."

He went to the overturned table, and found a piece of paper, and for a minute or two wrote on it. His face still streamed with the exertion of the struggle, and his hand was unsteady. But he was smiling, as if all danger was past, as if broad sunlight, not the darkness of the pit, was about them.

What he wrote was this:

"BELOVED LADY.

"It is only this moment that I have seen what is to be. You will wake, but with your eyes of mortal sight you will not, I am sure, see your loving servant again. But speak to me sometimes in the ways we know of. My love for you is stronger than death, and I am going to prove it so. May happiness and peace rest always on your house!

"Your most humble and loving servant,

"ABDUL."

He folded his note and gave it to Leonard.

"Give it her when she wakes," he said. "I must go. My work is not here any longer. Perhaps I shall come back, but I do not think so."

"No, you mustn't leave us," said Leonard. "You may be wanted by her. When she wakes she is sure to want you."

Abdul smiled, the calm, patient smile of his race.

"I am wanted by her now," he said, "but not here. There is one way only; I see it. I must take it."

He spoke with authority, then turned to look once more on the woman he loved with a love that was so infinitely more strong than death. Jack was still kneeling by her, and he spoke to him.

"I must kiss her once," he said. "There is no harm."

Jack looked up at him with amazement. But there was that in Abdul's face that amazed him more, a look that he had never yet seen in any human face; for it was the face of one who is utterly purged of all earthly desire, of one who, though he was yet on earth, had done with all material and earthly things. The flesh was but a mere transparent envelope, and through it shone a soul so strong, serene, and beautiful that he felt gross and unworthy to be near him.

"Yes, Abdul," he said, "kiss her, and then go out to do whatever you must do. And God speed you, whatever it is."

Then Abdul bent down and kissed her once, even as Jack had kissed her, on the forehead, with the reverence of a true lover, and stood there a moment more looking at her. Then he turned to the other two.

"I know," he said. "The open vision has come to me unsought. Keep her like that for an hour; that is all you have to do. There will be no more after that, no need for more of it"—and he pointed to the bottle of anæsthetic—"or of me. Farewell, effendi and friends of mine."

He spoke with an air of authority that none questioned or thought of questioning, but paused at the door, made his deep Arab obeisance, and left the room. The clear vision had come unsought to him, the vision which he knew was granted only to those to whom death was very near. What, in detail, the next hour should bring forth, or in what manner it should come, he had no clear notion: all he knew was that the voice that he had listened for, the whispers of which he had heeded all his life, had come to him now clear and articulate. To what it would guide him he did not yet know: he knew only that its guidance was assured:

like a child he grasped a hand that enfolded his, a hand that seemed to him actually present, in warmth and pressure like a human hand, the hand of a friend and a guide.

It drew him from the room, it led him downstairs, and out into the fog, with a leading so assured that, though he knew not where his next step would take him, each single step was enough. Violence, struggle, death, he believed were close in front of him, yet as surely the love that was stronger than death was with him. Henderson, he felt assured, was the objective, the man who had loosed hell on the innocent. Yet for Henderson he felt no resentment nor anger. If the wages of his sin were death, and he, Abdul, had to pay him them, yet he paid them only as a natural immutable force exacts death as the penalty of transgression of its laws. He felt no more anger either for the sinner or the sin than the rocks at the bottom of a precipice feel for the climber who has slipped a thousand feet above them, and which in penalty for his rashness, break him, yet with no savagery, into something that is scarcely the semblance of a man.

So through the thick, palpable atmosphere Abdul went across the Square, knowing that he was led. Round him, in muffled *lento* of the fog, moved those whose business or whose pleasure took them out into the inclement evening; groping walkers shuffled by him; cabs and hansoms went at a wary foot's pace, nosing slowly and warily into the obscurity of the thick dense vapours. But Abdul moved faster than most: somehow, he knew there was not much time to spare, and his hand was in another's, one whom he trusted, one who knew the way.

At the bottom of Hay Hill he paused; he was there in time—of that, also, he felt certain. A gas-lamp peered down through the fog, making a ring of illumination a yard or two across, and by this he waited, without any conscious thought present in his mind, knowing only that when he must go on he would go on. Even the horror of the last hours had gone from him: it was no more than a forgotten dream. Then from the north came a footstep, quicker and more decided than the general footfalls, and a man passed close to him. It was he, and yet even the sight of him roused no resentment or indignation in Abdul's mind. He himself was again no more than the rocks on which the climber would be broken. And he followed him.

At that hour all that was utterly evil in Henderson held undominated supremacy. Five minutes ago, when he started from Davies Street, he was perhaps a little sorry, a little ashamed, at what he had done, for he had trembled when he set hand to the latch; but shut off alone with himself in this encircling and isolating blindness of fog he was sorry no longer. He knew only that when he came back—and this he thought he knew with utter certainty—Ida would be there, weak, terrified, maybe, to the verge of death, with squinting eyes; but it would be she, whom he desired more than he desired the joys of heaven, in his power, given to him at last. Then it would but remain to make the circle once more, and deliver her from the dreadful spirit that had brought her to him. And never, so he swore to himself, would she regret that he had exercised this force of hell to win her. All that love could give, and his love was powerful to give her all that was really dearest to her soul, would be hers: he would teach her the completeness of spiritual life which it was within his reach to bring her, of which she had had but a foretaste in those interrupted séances. To-night would see them away from London, which, associated as it was with the real suffering, the unsatisfied longings which had been his, had become hateful to him, and in four or five days the palm-clad South would be theirs. It was in an exaltation of wickedness that he walked: he could no longer sanely estimate the infamy he had perpetrated: indeed, it seemed to him infamous no longer—all moral judgment was gone from him.

He passed Abdul close, but without seeing him, and Abdul followed, knowing that his time was not yet, though near. The streets a little lower down were full again of passengers; men jostled in and out of each other's arms, groping blindly in this leaden thickness of fog. All down Piccadilly Abdul followed, descending after the man he pursued into the grosser blackness of St. James's Street. At the bottom Henderson hesitated a moment, but in such an evening the short-cut across the park might easily prove to be the longest way, and instead he went down Pall Mall and into Whitehall, keeping to the guidance which the houses would give him.

Here the fog was markedly less dense; spaces of comparative clearness and lucidity intervened, and Abdul

dropped a little further back from the man he followed, yet still keeping him well within sight, and careful only to minimize the risk of recognition should Henderson turn. At the bottom of Whitehall he crossed the street, and went eastwards under the Houses of Parliament, then turned in through the door of a big lighted house just opposite the clock-tower. And still smiling, still assured and patient, Abdul waited till he should reappear. The time was getting very near now, but he was in no hurry.

And waiting there, as utterly without impatience with regard to what was coming as he was without fear, the material world, with its mortal needs and cries and terrors and gropings in the dark, passed from him for ever. Only one deed on this earth lay in front of him, and it was not as a man, so he felt, that he would do it, but as a force that stood outside the range of material things. That concerned him personally not at all; it was the one Eternal Will that decreed this; for his own will there was no longer any use; his book had been closed when he kissed Ida, and that was the last of his mortal voluntary acts. Yet even now, from the habit of mere life, his mind went back over the years that had been one long effort of devotion of self to the inward call, devotion so ungrudgingly rendered, so sweetly rewarded. Once again he was with his beloved mistress, while yet that river of golden hair was unloosed on her back, teaching her the elements of spiritual things: again he saw her grow up, increasing in wisdom and in beauty, always ready to learn, with always a smile, too, for her teacher until storm came, the storm that had descended one March night close on a year ago. But to-night the damage of it would be repaired: to-morrow for her would dawn cloudless again, and the last skirts of the tempest would have left the sky: for himself also there would be no more clouds in the day that would then have dawned for him.

A sudden draught of air moved up the river, and the fog melted before it, dissolving, dispersing with wonderful rapidity, till, swinging high in the eternal calm of the heavens, there shone down with a very clear light the moon near to its full. It was but a narrow cleavage of the fog, for it was as dense as ever on the Surrey side; it was dense, too, a hundred yards only to the west of where Abdul waited. But here and over the river to the east was the

clearness as of a Southern night: stars innumerable clustered together in the velvet vault of the heavens; just this one pathway to the sky, this celestial funnel, was open and serene. At the moment Henderson's figure appeared again in the doorway of the house which he had entered ten minutes ago, and he lingered there a moment shaking hands with some man who had evidently come down with him, just to see him to the door. Then the two parted, and he stepped out into the street alone. From then until the end Abdul's eyes never left him, but his eyes were not angry: they were patient—they were sorry, even.

The wonder of this extraordinary local dispersal of the fog seemed to strike Henderson: his business here had taken him less time than he had anticipated, and as he did not want to get back to Davies Street before the hour was up, he strolled on to Westminster Bridge, there to observe the wonderful effect of this oasis of moonshine in the desert of the fog, for it was a thing that might have given pause to a murderer flying for his life, so exquisite and unusual was it. And to his own mind he was no murderer: there was no known justice that could touch him. He had but exercised the powers that were his, which he had brought to such perfection in himself, and he claimed by right of conquest a soul for his own. Thoughts of some random poetical order, too, streamed through his brain; on such a night and on such a night in the near future would Ida be with him, and the moon that now approached to fulness would shine complete and round on them when two nights hence it lit up the dewy decks where they would pace together and watch the tideless sea break in phosphorescent bubbles round the prow of the southward-going ship, as she ploughed her way to the shores of the ancient and mysterious land of the Nile. So in this supreme and ultimate moment neither shame nor remorse was his: the golden imminent future blinded his eyes, thoughts of the moon and stars were his, lovers' thoughts, and that it was through the unloosing of the powers of hell that he should make real his dreams cast not a shadow there. This had to be—by right Ida should be his, by the right of his strength and his love.

Like a meteor, momentary and luminous, these thoughts blazed through him, as he paused in the middle of the bridge, and then turned homewards again. The broad asphalt pave-

ment on either hand was empty, the luminous circle of the clock in the tower told him that it was time to return, and he began to retrace his steps. Then from the roadway a figure that was somehow familiar, not strange to him in any sense—for, since for the last minute or two he had been far away in sunlit Egypt, among sands and temples, the unusual garb seemed but natural to his thoughts—came swiftly towards him, and until it was quite close it but chimed in with his mood. But when he saw who it was, terror at that which was even more vivid and certain than the golden future which had just now seemed so close unloosed his knees. He was a brave man, but about this there was something final, it was so quiet, so inexorable.

"Abdul?" he said, and for a moment his voice choked. "What do you want?"

Then terror gained on him: he looked fearfully to either side, and saw he was alone with this man and with the fate he brought. Behind him—for he had faced the road—was the low parapet; beyond and below that the full tide of the river ran seawards, smooth and deep, and the moon wavered on the waters, in scrolls of reflected light, tipping the waves with silver.

Abdul was standing close to him now; there was no anger in that dark face, yet there was no pity there, and the mortal terror, the terror of death, of going out alone into the silent sea, overcame him, and he turned to run. But it was too late to run: he was already clutched. And he would have shouted for help, but his throat was clutched also, and only a thin, strangled cry came from it. Then very quietly Abdul spoke.

"I have come to kill you," he said, "and I think to die. For love is stronger than death, and I love her, and death is but a friend, and she is delivered. I know no way but this."

Then Henderson's strength came back to him, and he fought like a fiend. Twice he forced his adversary back into the roadway, twice he exulted to himself, thinking that now and now he could loose the throttling hand from his throat, kneel on the chest of this bravo, this footpad, who for the moment stood between him and love, and stamp the life out of him. Yet it was like fighting with a shadow: struggle as he would, he could effect nothing, and step by step he was forced back again on to the pavement, nearer to the parapet.

Those fingers had never yet been loosened from his throat, and already his ears sang and his head buzzed.

Then he felt something hard and smooth, and as unyielding as Abdul's hand at his throat, in the middle of his back, and knew it to be the parapet of the bridge. Eternity was not longer than that moment, and the knowledge that his strength was fast giving way was with him through those æons. Then the rustling air sped by them both, and the moon tipped the waves of their falling with silver, and turned the fresh fountain of the spray into spouts of living light.





EPILOGUE

THE shadows of the June evening were lengthening over the grass, and the wind of sunset was fragrant with its passage over the rose-garden. On the heights of the ridge of the forest the sun still lingered, turning the green of the grass into living emerald, and the russet of the heather into gold. The shadow of the house, though, stretched out beyond the terrace, warm and fragrant and mellow, and in it stood Ida with the man she had married that day. They were to spend a week here alone, so it had been settled; at the end of that time Mrs. Desmond would come down. If they did not want her, they were to telegraph very briefly to say, "We don't want you." But if they did not telegraph she would join them, assuming that they did not object to her presence.

The two had been very silent for the last hour. Ida occasionally had asked a question, but had followed it up with an injunction. "Don't tell me if you would sooner not."

And twice, at any rate, he had said:

"No, dear; it is better for me not to speak of that."

But this silence had somewhat disturbed her, and at length her trouble found utterance.

"Oh, Jack," she said, "it is our marriage-day, and from to-day it will all be behind me. But there are one or two things, I think, I must know. I do not want to know what happened in those hours——"

"Oh, Ida——" he said.

But she shook her head.

"You must not be frightened at what is gone, is dead, dear Jack," she said. "Never be frightened at that—or at anything."

She paused a moment.

"But I don't ask you about that," she went on. "To me

it is nothing more than a dream. It was not me—oh, you know that. I had nothing to do with it. It was It."

She caught up his left hand. There was a scar on it, running from the first joint of the forefinger to the middle of the back of the hand—a scar healed over, but white on the wholesome brown. She drew her finger gently over it.

"Nor do I ask you about that," she said, "for it was not I. I am not even sorry for that, since it had nothing to do with me. But my redemption, Jack—I want to know about that."

He looked at her a moment in silence.

"Yes, darling," he said, "it is only right. It may hurt you: it may make you cry a little, but why not? The awful things are those for which one cannot cry. I would have given the world once to have been able to cry, but I could not. Leonard tells me I laughed after Abdul had gone out—sat and shrieked with laughter. He gave me something to stop me—same as what he gave you."

"Ah, Jack, Jack!" she whispered. "Yes?"

Jack cleared his throat; even now across the broad sunlight of his happiness some shadow lay which, perhaps, would never quite pass from him. As by an earthquake the very foundations of his being had been shaken.

"We don't know much," he said, "for we were all rather attentive to you, and when about seven o'clock in the evening—that evening—you came to yourself, and awoke from the anæsthetic that old Leonard had given you, we—we were rather glad, if you understand, because it was you who came back to us—you yourself; yet, just that, you yourself."

"And Abdul?" she said again.

"Yes, I was telling you. Before that, you see, Abdul had gone out, leaving for you the note that you were given. He must have followed him—Henderson. For next morning there came ashore, just opposite the Greenwich pier, two bodies. There was no question about who they were."

There was a long silence; the shadows lengthened on the grass, the wind of sunset rustled among the bushes, and wafted the "good-night" of the flowers one to another. There was no sighing and waving of palm-tree fronds there: the "good-night" was gentle and fragrant.

"Then, did Abdul kill him?" asked the girl.

"Yes, dear; there was no doubt of that. Ah, it will hurt you again."

"No, no," said she. "You don't understand. It cannot hurt me."

"There was no doubt of that," repeated Jack. "His fingers were on Henderson's throat. There was even a doubt whether Henderson was not dead before he was drowned. I say it badly, but you see."

"And Abdul?" she asked.

"Ah, there no one can tell you," he said. "It is all uncertain: but it appeared that Abdul could have left the other dead, and saved himself, if he could swim."

"Oh, yes," said she; "he used to swim in the Nile every day."

"Then he preferred not to swim. His hand was still clasped on Henderson's throat, but perhaps he preferred to die. That is not hard to understand. For I can understand it myself, and even now, oh, Ida—even now I almost wish that it had been given me to do that for your sake. But that night I could not help; the higher work was given him. I envied him. For he loved you, and within an hour he laid down his life for you. He went out from us like a man who is going home. He thought of it like that too, I am sure!"

Jack's lips quivered: he had not known really till now how his love dominated him also, making death a mere small incident in the events of a day. Something rose in his throat, choking him, and with swimming eyes he turned to her in a sort of mute appeal.

"God bless you, dear!" she said, "even as He has blessed him. And now I, this wretched, helpless I, for whom you two have done these things——"

"That is how He has blessed us both," said Jack.

THE END

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